

THE LOVE OF GOD
and the
CROSS OF JESUS

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CONTENTS

PART I

CROSSES OF THE SENSES

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES	3
Art. I. The Necessity for Purification	6
Art. II. Psychological Description of the Passive Purification of the Senses	10
Art. III. A Causal Explanation of the State of Purifi- cation	18
II. WHAT IS TO BE DONE DURING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES	27
III. EFFECTS OF THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES	40
IV. TRIALS ORDINARILY ACCOMPANYING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES	51
V. THE UNION WITH GOD ORDINARILY FOLLOWING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES	76

PART II

CROSSES OF THE SOUL

PURIFYING GRACES OF THE NIGHT OF THE SOUL

VI. THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL AS DE- SCRIBED BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS	97
VII. THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF FAITH	123
VIII. THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF HOPE	144

CHAPTER	PAGE
IX. THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF CHARITY	161
X. CHARACTERISTIC SIGNS OF THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL	176

PART III

THE LIFE OF UNION THROUGH JESUS AND MARY

XI. THE ABIDING OF THE BLESSED TRINITY IN PURIFIED SOULS AND TRANSFORMING UNION	199
XII. THE PLACE OF THE UNITIVE LIFE AND THE MYSTICAL ORDER	228
Art. I. The Spirituality of St. Alphonsus: Its General Characteristics	229
Art. II. A Comparison of the Spirituality of St. Alphonsus with the Principles of St. Thomas and the Doctrine of St. John of the Cross	234
XIII. THE UNITY AND SUBLIMITY OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE: A SYNTHESIS OF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION	268
Art. I. The Apostolic Life: Its Difficulty and Superiority	269
Art. II. The Special End of the Apostolic Life	273
Art. III. The Elements of Religious Life in Apostolic Orders	282
XIV. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF UNION	291
Art. I. Christ's Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews	293
Art. II. The Perfection of Christ's Priesthood	297
Art. III. The Formal Cause of Christ's Priesthood	308
XV. THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST	314
Art. I. Christ's Universal Kingship in Holy Scripture	315

CHAPTER	PAGE
Art. II. The Nature, Basis, and Excellence of Christ's Kingship	321
Art. III. The Exercise of Christ's Royal Power	327
XVI. EXEMPLAR FOR OUR FREE WILL: CHRIST'S IMPECCABLE LIBERTY	331
Art. I. The World's Notion of Liberty	333
Art. II. Christ's Liberty on Earth	336
Art. III. The Liberty of the Saints	341
XVII. MARY, MODEL OF THE LIFE OF REPARATION	347
Art. I. Mary Mediatrix and the Grace of Final Perseverance	348
Art. II. The Mystery of Mary's Sorrows	354
XVIII. ST. JOSEPH: MODEL OF THE HIDDEN LIFE AND FIRST AMONG THE SAINTS	366
XIX. THE SOUL OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS	384
EPILOGUE. The Narrow Path of Perfection and the Full Development of the Illuminative and Unitive Ways	411
CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY GHOST	420
THE WAY OF THE CROSS ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS	421
THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY	435
INDEX	449

PART I

CROSSES OF THE SENSES

CHAPTER I

THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES

When speaking of mortification or active purification we have already said that we must impose it upon ourselves chiefly for the following reasons: (1) to correct whatever inordinate tendencies resulting from original sin remain after baptism; (2) to destroy the results of our personal sins and to make reparation for offending God; (3) to prevent an overdevelopment of our natural activity and consequent injury to the life of grace, together with an increasing blindness to the infinite sublimity of our supernatural end; (4) to imitate Christ crucified and to work with Him for the salvation of souls.

Our Lord Himself pointed out this fourth reason to us when He said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."¹ In quoting these words, St. Luke remarks that Christ said them "to all." To mortify ourselves still falls short, in fact, of what is necessary; we must bear patiently as well the crosses God sends us to purify us, to make us like to our Savior, and, in a sense, to so continue the mystery of redemption with Him, by Him, and in Him until the end of time.

What Christian terminology calls "the Cross" by analogy with the sufferings and death of our Lord, is made up of the

¹ Luke 9: 23; Matt. 16: 24; Mark 8: 34.

daily physical and moral trials arising from our relations with the world of things and of men but especially of those sufferings sent more directly by God to make us more like Christ Jesus, who became "obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross"² for the ransom of mankind. "As the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I."³ All Christians, each in the measure of his capacity, must go even to these lengths to follow our divine Master.

The necessity of the cross is laid on us principally for two reasons. The first is that the roots of evil we bear within us go much deeper than we may think, and we hardly know where these germs of death are to be found. Even when we have mortified ourselves and tried hard to be regular and fervent, we still have many unconscious faults: egoism in various forms, even in our prayers and devotions, in study and the apostolate. Natural eagerness, spiritual sensuality, intellectual pride, self-judgment and self-will, all these prevent God's kingdom from becoming deeply established in us and keep us from closer union with Him. A vast difference exists between regularity, even when accompanied with a certain fervor, and true sanctity. The cross patiently borne for love bridges the distance between these two. Our Lord knows better than we do where the evil in us lies; He sends messengers to tell us, not always too charitably, the truth about ourselves and to put a finger on our touchiest points. He comes Himself, when necessary, with metal and fire to cut and cauterize our wounds, the principles of corruption which prevent us from becoming the living image of His Son.

The second reason why the cross is imposed on us has to do

² Phil. 2: 8.

³ John 14: 31.

with our two great models, Jesus and Mary. They had no need for purification; they suffered for our redemption. We must imitate them in this. Our association with our Lord in His redemptive work keeps pace with the growth of our union with Him, and He Himself used the cross as the principal means for redeeming the world, the supreme manifestation of His love for the Father and for us.

Consequently, as the lives of all the saints prove, the necessity of the cross is proportionate to the purification souls need and to the degree of their union with Christ, as well as of the apostolic and reparative life God efficaciously wills for them. Some souls, still in their baptismal innocence, have less need for purification; others, though already quite pure, live in almost continual suffering because our Lord calls them to an incomparably higher perfection than that which contents so many easily satisfied Christians. The more God loves us, the heavier crosses He sends us, and the more they resemble the cross carried by Christ and shared by His Blessed Mother.

To bear the cross patiently, we must understand it, see where it leads, and carry it in the light of love. It is therefore good for us to know the different ways in which God usually tries souls. Some crosses are intended to purify the senses and subject them to the spirit; these occur frequently and are common to many persons, especially to beginners. Other crosses are of the spirit. These have for their purpose the progressive supernaturalization of the soul and its growing subjection to God. Trials of this kind are the lot of a small number of advanced souls.

Spiritual writers properly speak, then, of two kinds of trials, calling one passive purification of the senses and the other passive purification of the soul, designations that help

us to determine what is essential to each and what trials commonly accompany them. And thus we can come to understand why souls must undergo a twofold passive purification to arrive at the full perfection of Christian life.

For the sake of order, the following questions will be taken up in this chapter in regard to the passive purification of the senses: first, the necessity for purification; secondly, its psychological description; and thirdly, its theological and causal explanation. In subsequent chapters the rules for direction appropriate for this state, together with its purifying effects and accompanying trials, will be discussed. Lastly we shall see just when the passive purification of the senses normally takes place, whether at the beginning of the illuminative way or considerably later.

ARTICLE I

THE NECESSITY FOR PURIFICATION

The spiritual imperfections of beginners (possible paths to pride, sensuality, and sloth of a spiritual kind) make purification necessary, as St. John of the Cross shows.⁴ These imperfections are, as it were, so many modulations of the seven capital sins appearing as different deviations in the spiritual life but all leading back to the principal ones just spoken of above. St. John of the Cross confines himself exclusively to the consideration of the trouble these cause in our relations with God, but they work no less harm to our relations with our neighbor and to the apostolate entrusted to us.

A man may become immoderately attached to sensible consolations and seek them for themselves, forgetting that they

⁴ *The Dark Night*, chaps. 2-9.

are not an end but a means; thus he may come to prefer the flavor of spiritual things to their essence. Spiritual greediness of this kind, when unsatisfied, begets impatience and, as soon as "the narrow path" has to be taken, spiritual sloth and a distaste for the work of sanctification so frequently referred to by early writers under the name of *acedia*.⁵

If, instead, everything goes as we would have it, we take pride in our perfection and judge others severely, posing as masters when we are nothing but poor disciples. Spiritual pride, St. John of the Cross says,⁶ leads beginners to avoid masters who disapprove of their spirit and even sometimes to harbor ill will toward them. They look for guides to suit their tastes, desire to be intimate with them, and confess their sins to them in such a way as "to excuse themselves rather than to accuse themselves. . . . And sometimes they seek another confessor to tell the wrongs they have done, so that their own confessor shall think they have done nothing wrong at all."⁷

This hypocrisy pointed out by St. John of the Cross in beginners, who need to undergo the passive purification of the senses, shows clearly that, for him, they are beginners in the sense in which that term is generally understood and that we should take literally and in the ordinary sense of the words what is said in *The Dark Night*: "the night of sense is common and comes to many; these are the beginners."⁸ It cannot, therefore, be admitted, as some hold, that the beginners referred to here are already living in the unitive way after passing through active purification and that they merit the

⁵ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 35.

⁶ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. 8.

name of beginners only from a very special point of view, so far as they are making a beginning, not in the interior life, but in the passive ways, considered as more or less extraordinary and beyond the normal way.⁹

The faults St. John of the Cross speaks of certainly show that he is talking about real beginners, not in a special sense, but in the traditional sense of the word, taken in its full and unwatered meaning with particular reference to those having either a contemplative vocation or a call to the apostolate, the overflowing of contemplation.

Many other faults companion those remarked by St. John of the Cross, but he scarcely comments on them since he concerns himself, as has been said, only with our relations with God and not, as it were, with the repercussions these faults have on study and the apostolate. However, to round out his thought on this point presents little difficulty.

Beginners—and the retarded, too, of whom there are but too many—devote themselves to study more out of curiosity than from love of truth and, as they fail to appreciate the value of truth, they take insufficient precautions against error. They are likely to overevaluate themselves, to become irritated when others seem not to recognize their worth. Jealousy and envy lead them to disparage fellow workers more talented and more disinterested than themselves and so to block the good influence these might have exerted on others, who may fail, therefore, to advance or even to persevere because of this lack. People who do things like this may work

⁹ It is to be regretted that Tanquerey in his treatise on *The Spiritual Life*, tr. Branderis, 2nd ed. (Tournai: Desclée, 1930), pp. 601 ff., favors this point of view, placing the night of the senses in Bk. III where he considers the unitive way. In doing so he departs not only from the terminology of St. John of the Cross but both from his teaching and from traditional doctrine as well.

great harm to the general good without being conscious of it. Even in scholarly religious circles a thousand petty passions and intrigues may influence minds and result in books and reviews becoming tainted with untruth, even when, and perhaps especially when, all concerned profess to be quite objective. Irritating controversies arise only too often because those concerned have but relative good faith.

Those who give themselves to the apostolate bring much natural eagerness and self-seeking to it and they unconsciously make themselves the center of their activity and attract souls either to themselves or to the groups to which they belong instead of to our Lord Jesus Christ. And when trials come they complain and allow themselves to sink into discouragement. Anyone who sets out to indicate all the nuances of the seven capital sins on this level of human activity, either in beginners or in the great number of retarded souls, would never be done.

All this shows us the necessity for profound purification. Exterior, and especially interior, mortification can doubtless correct many of these faults, but what we impose on ourselves cannot suffice to tear up the roots that reach down into the depths of our faculties. The remains of sin impregnate, as it were, our temperament and character. We are unconscious of this, but our neighbor is not and sometimes, without saying anything, suffers much because of it. St. John of the Cross says:

But neither from these imperfections nor from those others can the soul be perfectly purified until God brings it into the passive purgation of that dark night whereof we shall speak presently. It befits the soul, however, in so far as it can, to contrive to labour, on its own account, to purge and perfect itself, so that it may merit

being taken by God into that Divine care wherein it becomes healed of all things that it was unable of itself to cure. Because, however greatly the soul itself labours, it cannot actively purify itself so as to be in the least degree prepared for the Divine union of perfection of love, if God takes not its hand and purges it not in that dark fire, in the way and manner that we have to describe.¹⁰

Further, to remedy the faults of the proficient, there must later be another much more grievous and proportionately more fruitful purification of the spirit.¹¹

ARTICLE II

PSYCHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES

In describing this state, many authors place particular emphasis on its negative aspect: the loss of all sensible devotion and the great difficulty experienced in discursive meditation. They give us the impression that it is a time of relapse rather than of progress, not bringing out what is positive and principal in the night of the senses: a strong desire for God, a sign of the beginning of infused contemplation, the entrance into a new way.

It is commonly and truly said that, in the passive purification of the senses, the soul experiences complete sensible aridity in prayer and pious exercises; nothing offered to it in meditation or in the books it used to love attracts it any more; it no longer has any taste for these things and everywhere finds dryness and sterility. It has the impression of being left in darkness and penetrating cold, as though the sun which

¹⁰ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chaps. 1, 2.

gave light and warmth to the spirit had ceased. Sometimes this painful aridity engenders a disgust for spiritual things and even a sort of desolation, especially in souls temperamentally inclined to sadness, souls that formerly received sensible consolations. In the words of the Book of Job, they become a burden to themselves, "*factus sum mihimetipsi gravis.*"¹² They have no spirit for prayer or for work, and yet they realize how necessary prayer is. They ask themselves whether their aridity is lukewarmness, whether it comes from some partly unconscious fault of their own, for example, from presumption which they have taken for zeal. If they consult others, many wish to persuade them that their trouble is due to melancholy and that they ought to take the appropriate remedies for it: exercise, diversion, and exterior works.

Authors usually add that sensible aridity is a privation of merely accidental, but not of substantial, devotion. The will to give oneself generously to the service of God is not lost,¹³ but the senses and imagination are left in a kind of emptiness and the sensuous appetency finds no savor in anything. The disgust experienced with everything is really involuntary and fails to affect the will, which is as far above the sensuous appetency as the intellect is above the senses and imagination.

All this is true; but we must consider aridity or dryness of the sensuous appetency more closely so as to distinguish it from spiritual sloth or acedia, the privation of substantial devotion itself, a disgust for spiritual things both culpable and voluntary, if not in itself at least in the negligence which gives it birth.¹⁴ To confuse the night of the senses with

¹² Job 7: 20.

¹³ *Ila Hac*, q. 82, a. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 35.

spiritual sloth would be a grave speculative and practical error leading straight to quietism.

To draw a clear distinction between them, we shall have to return to the description of the passive night of the senses left us by St. John of the Cross, who plumbed the depths of St. Gregory the Great's doctrine on this point.¹⁵ In the Middle Ages Hugh of St. Victor¹⁶ and later Tauler¹⁷ developed this teaching. Together with these masters, we must insist on stressing the positive aspect of the state of purification, that is, a strong desire for God and for perfection, rather than the negative characteristics of aridity and difficulty in meditating. Indeed the soul makes great progress during this period because of the profound working of God within it, and this divine activity and the passive state resulting from it are plainly the chief elements of the state, although the negative notes of dryness and quasi-impossibility to meditate serve as the chief means of evidencing it, especially at first.

The description given by St. John of the Cross¹⁸ brings out what is most fundamental, positive, and divine in this state and will serve to help us get beyond its negative aspects to the supernatural reality produced by God. According to St. John of the Cross three principal signs, already noted by Tauler, manifest this state. He expresses it thus in *The Dark Night*:¹⁹

¹⁵ *Moral.*, XXIV, chap. 6, no. 11; X, chap. 10, no. 17. In *Ezech.*, Bk. II, hom. 2, nos. 2, 3, 13.

¹⁶ In *Ecl.*, hom. 1. Here Hugh of St. Victor compares the passive purification of the soul by divine grace to the transformation of green wood into fire.

¹⁷ *Institutions*, chap. 35. From their master's sermons Tauler's disciples gathered together the essentials of this doctrine into the *Institutions*.

¹⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The first (sign) is whether, when a soul finds no pleasure or consolation in the things of God,²⁰ it also fails to find it in anything created; for, as God sets the soul in this dark night to the end that He may quench and purge its sensual desire, He allows it not to find attraction or sweetness in anything whatsoever.²¹ Hence it may be laid down as very probable that this aridity and insipidity proceed not from recently committed sins or imperfections. For, if this were so, the soul would feel in its nature some inclination or desire to taste other things than those of God. . . . Since, however, this lack of enjoyment in things above or below might proceed from some indisposition or melancholy humour, which oftentimes makes it impossible for the soul to take pleasure in anything, it becomes necessary to apply the second sign and condition.

The second sign whereby a man may believe himself to be experiencing the said purgation is that ordinarily the memory is centred upon God, with painful care and solicitude, thinking that it is not serving God, but is backsliding, because it finds itself without sweetness in the things of God. And in such a case it is evident that this lack of sweetness and this aridity come not from weakness and lukewarmness; for it is the nature of lukewarmness not to care greatly or to have any inward solicitude for the things of God . . . for lukewarmness consists in great weakness and remissness in the will and in the spirit, without solicitude as to serving God; whereas purgative aridity is ordinarily accompanied by solicitude, with care and grief, as I say, because the soul is not serving God. And although this may sometimes be increased by melancholy or some other humour (as it frequently is) it fails not for this reason to produce a purgative effect upon the desire, since

²⁰ What is meant is that the soul no longer finds consolation in things divine proposed to it in a sensible way, for example, by way of the imagination in discursive meditation.

²¹ Later it will be made evident that this is an effect of the gift of knowledge, which shows us the vanity of all created things and their inability to reveal to us God's intimate life.

the desire is deprived of all pleasure, and has its care centred upon God alone. . . . When the cause is aridity, it is true that the sensual part of the soul has fallen low, and is weak and feeble in its actions, by reason of the little pleasure which it finds in them; but the spirit, on the other hand, is ready and strong.²²

St. John of the Cross insists on the positive character of the second sign:

For the cause of this aridity is that God transfers to the spirit the good things and the strength of the senses, which, since the soul's natural strength and senses are incapable of using them, remain barren, dry and empty. For the sensual part of a man has no capacity for that which is pure spirit, and thus, when it is the spirit that receives the pleasure, the flesh is left without savour and is too weak to perform any action. But the spirit, which all the time is being fed, goes forward in strength, and with more alertness and solicitude than before, in its anxiety not to fail God; and if it is not immediately conscious of spiritual sweetness and delight, but only of aridity and lack of sweetness, the reason for this is the strangeness of the exchange; for its palate has become accustomed to those other sensual pleasures upon which its eyes are still fixed, and, since the spiritual palate is not made ready or purged for such subtle pleasure, until it finds itself becoming prepared for it by means of this arid and dark night, it cannot experience spiritual pleasure and good. . . .

These souls whom God is beginning to lead through these solitary places of the wilderness are like to the children of Israel; to whom in the wilderness God began to give food from Heaven, containing within itself all sweetness, and, as is there said, it turned

²² Just as in the first sign we see the effects of the gift of knowledge, in the second we find manifest the gifts of fortitude and fear of the Lord. These, too, will be given further consideration later.

to the savour which each one of them desired. But withal the children of Israel felt the lack of the pleasures and delights of the flesh and the onions which they had eaten aforetime in Egypt.

This state has also been compared to the teething period of infants; when they begin to cut their teeth, they have continual pain, but after their teeth have come through they are ready for stronger food and will receive it. At first it has no appeal for them, but soon they grow to need and desire it. Because the same is true of the spiritual life, St. John of the Cross adds:

The which food is the beginning of contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses; which contemplation is secret and hidden from the very person that experiences it; and ordinarily, together with the aridity and emptiness which it causes in the senses, it gives the soul an inclination and desire to be alone and in quietness, without being able to think of any particular thing or having the desire to do so. If those souls to whom this comes to pass knew how to be quiet at this time . . . then they would delicately experience this inward refreshment in that ease and freedom from care. So delicate is this refreshment that ordinarily, if a man have desire or care to experience it, he experiences it not; for, as I say, it does its work when the soul is most at ease and freest from care; it is like the air which, if one would close one's hand upon it, escapes. . . .

For in such a way does God bring the soul into this state, and by so different a path does He lead it that, if it desires to work with its faculties, it hinders the work which God is doing in it rather than aids it. . . . For anything that the soul can do of its own accord at this time serves only, as we have said, to hinder inward peace and the work which God is accomplishing in the spirit by means of that aridity of sense. . . .

The third sign whereby this purgation of the senses may be recognized is that the soul can no longer meditate or reflect in its sense of the imagination, as it was wont, however much it may endeavor to do so. For God now begins to communicate Himself to it, no longer through sense, as He did aforetime, by means of reflections which joined and sundered its knowledge but by pure spirit, into which consecutive reflections enter not; for He communicates Himself to it by an act of simple contemplation.²³

On the subject of this third sign, St. John of the Cross remarks that "the embarrassment and dissatisfaction of the faculties proceed not from indisposition, for, when this is the case, and the indisposition, which is never permanent, comes to an end, then the soul is able once more, by taking some care about the matter, to do what it did before, and the faculties find their needed support. But in the purgation of the desire this is not so: when once the soul begins to enter therein, its inability to reflect with the faculties grows ever greater . . . although, at first, and with some persons, it is not as continuous."

In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*,²⁴ too, St. John of the Cross, while not following absolutely the same order, mentions these three signs when indicating at what time it is well to pass from discursive meditation to contemplation. This passage refers to infused contemplation. St. John of the Cross²⁵ says that contemplation works not actively but passively, being received from God operating in us and having

²³ When the gift of understanding is united to the gift of piety they make themselves evident by their effects, the gift of understanding serving as the principle of a knowledge of divine things that is not discursive but superior to reasoning, simple, and leading the soul to experience, as it were, things divine. Cf. IIa IIae, q. 8, a. 1, 2, 4, 7.

²⁴ Bk. II, chaps. 11, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, chaps. 12, 13.

such subtlety and delicacy that the soul may hardly notice its presence. In this state "God communicates Himself to it passively, even as to one who has his eyes open, so that light is communicated to him passively without his doing more than keep them open. And this reception of light which is infused supernaturally is passive understanding."²⁶ The state here referred to is the same as that described in *The Dark Night*.²⁷

Therefore, although this state is made manifest by two negative characteristics,—aridity or the deprivation of all sensible consolation and difficulty or quasi-powerlessness to meditate—it has another more important and positive element: the beginning of infused contemplation and the ardent desire for God which is born of it. Further, aridity of the sensuous appetency and difficulty in meditating spring precisely from this, that grace is starting to take on a new and purely spiritual form, superior to the senses and to discursive reasoning. At first sight we might be led to believe that God purifies us chiefly by depriving us of something, sensible grace; in reality He gives us much more than we had before because, far from taking grace away from us, He gives it to us more abundantly but in a higher form, far above the reach of any sense enjoyment. The state into which God thus leads the soul will be better understood when we have tried to discover its causes.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 15.

²⁷ The quotations just given, as well as many other texts, show that these chapters of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* (Bk. I, chap. 9) describe not two different states, one preceding the other in time, but the same state, the *Ascent of Mt. Carmel* dealing with its active aspect, *The Dark Night* with its passive. The earliest commentators took this view (cf. *Dict. de théol. cath.*, art. on St. John of the Cross); and more and more are coming to recognize it at the present time.

ARTICLE III

A CAUSAL EXPLANATION OF THE STATE OF PURIFICATION

Some authors²⁸ find the explanation for the state of purification chiefly in the deprivation of sensible grace. Since the beginner might, through spiritual greediness, become too attached to it, he is deprived of it for his own sake, as the author of *The Dark Night* remarks.²⁹ Although the deprivation of grace truly belongs to this state, it is not the principal thing at issue. The fundamental characteristic for us to note is the beginning of infused contemplation due to the habitual intervention of the Holy Ghost. The texts already quoted from St. John of the Cross treating of the three signs make this clear to us.

The first sign is, as has already been said, that the soul can no longer find consolation either in things created or in the things of God presented in a sensible manner. The gift of knowledge effects this, making us understand as if experimentally the emptiness of created things and their radical inability to tell us anything of God's inner life. Knowledge differs from wisdom inasmuch as it knows things not through their Supreme Cause but through their proximate and lower causes. Now the only thing in the world and in us that does not spring from the Supreme Cause is sin, the imperfection of our acts, our indigence, our weakness. All these arise solely from defectible and deficient created causes. Because St. Augustine and St. Thomas appreciated this truth, they have related the holy sadness spoken of by Christ in the fifth

²⁸ For example, Anthony of the Holy Spirit, *Directorium mysticum*, tr. II, d. IV, sect. 2, no. 221.

²⁹ Bk. I, chap. 8.

beatitude to the gift of knowledge; for knowledge of the gravity of sin and of the nothingness of creatures brings us to tears of contrition. St. Augustine says that those who mourn are those who know what defeats they have suffered by seeking evils as good.³⁰

St. Thomas, too, tells us that the gift of knowledge makes us judge as we should of human things, showing us how foolish a man is to seek the sovereign good in them even when they often prove an occasion for turning us from God.³¹ In the Old Testament the Book of Ecclesiastes is never done telling us of the vanity and poverty of all human things: riches acquired with great effort, worldly pleasures, human wisdom. "Vanity of vanities," said Ecclesiastes, "and all things are vanity," except to love and serve God. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come . . . before . . . the dust return into its earth, from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it. . . . Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is all man. And all things that are done, God will bring into judgment from every error, whether it be good or evil."³²

This deep sense of the vanity of things created when not ordered to God, when not directed to knowing, loving, and serving Him, penetrates every page of *The Imitation*. We are told, for example, "Without Me, friendship can neither profit nor endure"; "Never read anything in order that thou mayst appear more learned or more wise."³³

Ruysbroeck gives us the same message: divine knowledge will teach us to be without presumption and not to place our

³⁰ *Libr. I de sermone Domini in monte*, c. 4.

³¹ IIa IIae, q. 9, a. 4.

³² Eccles. 12: 1-14.

³³ Bk. III, chaps. 42, 43.

joy either in perishable things or in our works but to be dissatisfied with ourselves as unprofitable servants and creatures weak in every way. Blessed are they who suffer this dissatisfaction for they shall be comforted in the eternal kingdom of God.³⁴ Ruysbroeck also notes the relationship between the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the passive purification of the senses, writing that Christ first comes to exercise His influence and action on a man's lower powers to purify, uplift, and inflame them, and orient them toward his inner life. Working within the soul, God holds out His gifts to us or takes them away, enriches us or makes us poor, gives us joy or makes us desolate, quickens us or abandons us, sets our hearts on fire or binds them about with ice. No language whatever, Ruysbroeck tells us, can express these contrary gifts.³⁵ They are graces evidently connected with the passive purification of the senses.³⁶ By them we begin truly to know by experience the emptiness of created things and really to see that God alone can be our ultimate end. The gift of knowledge is having a profound influence on the soul.³⁷

The gifts of fear of the Lord and of fortitude are deeply at work too, as shown by the second sign referred to above when, in the words of St. John of the Cross, the soul knows "painful care and solicitude, thinking that it is not serving God, but is backsliding; . . . the sensual part of the soul has fallen low . . . but the spirit, on the other hand, is ready and strong."³⁸

³⁴ *Le royaume des amants de Dieu*, chap. 18.

³⁵ *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. 63.

³⁷ Cf. *Libre de la Bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno*, ed. Paul Doncœur (Paris: Lib. de l'art Cath., 26). The ninth step of the way of the cross as outlined here seems to correspond to the night of the senses; the nineteenth, to the night of the soul.

³⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

The care and solicitude experienced by the soul are certainly effected by the gift of fear of the Lord, the filial fear of sinning which grows with the progress of charity, while servile fear, the fear of being punished, diminishes.³⁹ Under the influence of this gift the soul resists the temptations against chastity and patience which often accompany passive purification of the senses. It repeats the words of the Psalmist, "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear: for I am afraid of Thy judgments."⁴⁰ According to St. Augustine, the gift of fear of the Lord corresponds to the beatitude of the poor in spirit, for he who fears God does not become puffed up, seeks neither honors nor riches, but is especially inspired to love poverty and the hidden life because they make him more like his Savior. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And even in this world their poverty will give them a share in the only true wealth.⁴¹

The influence of the gift of fortitude makes itself felt at this time in an ardent desire to serve God in spite of dryness, temptations, and every other possible difficulty. According to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, this gift corresponds to the fourth beatitude, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill." The relationship is evident. St. Thomas says: "Now it is very difficult, not merely to do virtuous deeds, which receive the common designation of works of justice, but furthermore to do them with an insatiable desire, which may be signified by hunger and thirst for justice."⁴² The gift of fortitude must come to the aid of the virtues of patience and longsuffering; otherwise, amid the difficulties, misfortunes, and contradictions

³⁹ IIa IIae, q. 19, a. 9, 12.

⁴⁰ Ps. 118: 120.

⁴¹ IIa IIae, q. 19, a. 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, q. 139, a. 2.

that have to be met, we would lose our ardent desire for perfection.

Enthusiasm based on sense feelings burns out like a fire of dried grass; we need ardor of another and wholly spiritual order, something God alone can give us. *The Imitation* says: "If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end. . . . And the more the flesh is brought down by affliction, the more is the spirit strengthened by interior grace. . . . This is not man's power, but the grace of Christ; which doth and can effect such great things in frail flesh that what it naturally abhors and flies, even this, through fervor of spirit, it now embraces and loves."⁴³

Ruysbroeck says that the gift of fortitude allows us to rise above joys and sorrows, gains and losses, hope and care for earthly things, and every kind of intermediary and multiplicity. It delivers us and makes us free of all creatures. The man who has it will not let himself become dissipated by sensible affection or in covetousness for sweetness and consolation or for any divine gift. Even the rest and peace of his own heart will not lure him from going beyond all gifts and consolations to find the only one whom he desires and loves.⁴⁴

Lastly, the third sign, that is, great difficulty in discursive meditation, certainly reveals to us the gift of understanding making itself evident as the principle of newly infused contemplation. In explaining the third sign, St. John of the Cross says: "God now begins to communicate Himself to it, no longer through sense, as He did aforetime, by means of reflections which joined and sundered its knowledge, but

by pure spirit, into which consecutive reflections enter not; but He communicates Himself to it by an act of simple contemplation, to which neither the exterior nor the interior senses of the lower part of the soul can attain."⁴⁵ Here we have "the beginning of a contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses, . . . secret and hidden to the very person that experiences it. . . . So delicate is this refreshment that ordinarily, if a man have desire or care to experience it, he experiences it not; for, as I say, it does its work when the soul is most at ease and freest from care."⁴⁶

The gift of understanding and that of piety show their influence in producing this effect. Ruysbroeck says that the first result of the gift of understanding shines forth in the spirit of simplicity. A remarkable clarity floods simplicity, for the grace of God is the basis of all the gifts and dwells essentially in our passive intellect as a simple light, fixing and enlightening the mind in a simple manner so that it acquires a resemblance to God. And it is a property of the unity of God's divine essence to attract whatever resembles it. Nevertheless a just man may sometimes think that he fails really to love God and rest in Him. But this very fear itself springs from love, for his desire to love God more than he can leads a man to believe that he loves God less than he is able.⁴⁷

Before the subject had been dealt with by these great mystics, St. Thomas took it up when treating of the effects of the gift of understanding, pointing out the purifying action of the gift, saying that it cleanses the mind by purging it of

⁴⁵ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles*, Bk. II, chap. 66.

⁴³ Bk. II, chap. 12.

⁴⁴ *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles*, Bk. II, chap. 64.

“phantasms and errors, so as to receive the truths which are proposed to it about God, no longer by way of corporeal phantasms, nor infected with heretical misrepresentations.”⁴⁸ It makes us penetrate simply but deeply into the mysteries of faith, taking us beyond images to the divine reality they represent and through the letter to the life-giving spirit.⁴⁹ During the dark night of the soul, the purifying influence of this gift penetrates much more deeply into the soul although it is already plainly operative in the night of the senses.

Furthermore, St. Thomas, following Dionysius, says that for the soul to reach the uniformity of contemplation, symbolized by circular motion without beginning or end, it must rid itself of a twofold lack of uniformity arising first from the variety of external things with which the mind is occupied and secondly from reasoning or discursive thought. The soul heals itself of its deformity by the simple contemplation of intelligible truth.⁵⁰

St. Augustine often says the same thing. We find a clear expression of it, for example, in the first book of the *De quantitate animae*⁵¹ when he describes the seven degrees of life: (1) vegetative life; (2) sentient life; (3) the knowledge of human things and of the different sciences; (4) the life of true virtue; (5) the tranquillity of soul springing from control of the passions by solid virtue; (6) entrance into the higher spiritual light; (7) contemplation and union with God. As early as in the fourth degree he gives a description

⁴⁸ *Ila Ilac*, q. 8, a. 7.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, a. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 180, a. 6.

⁵¹ Bk. I, chap. 33.

of the purification necessary for the soul to acquire true virtue and to understand practically how much more it is worth than the body and the whole material universe. He says that in the difficult work of purification the soul must place its whole confidence in God in order to resist all the temptations then arising and to persevere in virtue. The more the soul advances, the more it sees how far it still is from true purity of heart; but finally, God helping it, it lets itself be more and more animated by Him.⁵²

The doctrine taught by St. John of the Cross and by Ruysbroeck shows, in regard to this subject and many others, a wonderful harmony with the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas. What has been presented here is what seems to be the psychological description and theological explanation of the state of purification according to the great masters. Although the soul appears at first to lose rather than gain by having sensible graces taken away from it, it is in reality entering upon infused contemplation and standing on the threshold of the mystical life.

Still to be considered are rules of guidance suitable for those in this state, the effects of passive purification, the trials usually accompanying it, and lastly the stage of spiritual progress at which it normally appears. Because of the importance of the question, we should do all we can to know the mind of the great masters concerning it. In regard to the first stage of development at which passive purification occurs, whether during the course of the unitive way, as some seem to think, or at the beginning of the illuminative, the great masters evidently regard the illuminative way as a period in which

⁵² *Ibid.* Cf. *quartus gradus animae*.

the soul frees itself more and more from the senses and from reasoning so that it may go on under the special illumination of the Holy Ghost to the contemplation of divine things, to find, as all of us should, the soul of the interior life and of the apostolate in contemplation and charity.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS TO BE DONE DURING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES

Having given a psychological description of the passive purification of the senses and a theological explanation of the causes producing it and the end to which it is ordered, we must now speak of rules for direction suitable to this state. St. John of the Cross has treated the subject in the tenth chapter of the first book of *The Dark Night*; his teaching can be reduced to five principal observations explaining what ought not to be done, and then afterward what positive action should be taken.

God leads certain spiritual souls from meditation to contemplation, suspending the activity of the soul's faculties¹ so that there may be no obstacle to the infused contemplation. He is preparing them to receive, vivifying them with more abundant peace and enkindling them with the spirit of love.² St. John of the Cross says that they particularly need some one to understand them at this time and that, lacking such help, they may "abandon the road or lose courage; or, at least they may be hindered from going farther by the great trouble they take in advancing along the road of meditation and reasoning," or by desiring to enjoy consolation and satisfy their own inclinations.

¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 10.

² *Ibid.*

In other words, those who presently find themselves devoid of all sensible grace must guard against backsliding and should choose, if they can, a learned and experienced director. Difficulties in interior prayer arise because of the withdrawal of sensible graces and of the quasi-impossibility of meditating and because of accompanying temptations against chastity and patience aroused by the devil to turn the soul from prayer. Our Lord's words seem fully verified: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!"³

Our Lord permits aridity and temptations to make us live the life of the spirit more vigorously, but beginners get the impression that they have been left in a barren and waterless desert and they are afraid "of being lost on the road, thinking that all spiritual blessing is over for them and that God has abandoned them since they find no help or pleasure in good things."⁴ In the midst of such difficulties they may turn back if they do not have a well instructed and experienced guide; and, as a matter of fact, many do grow tired and retreat. At this time more than at any other the old saying that "Not to go forward is to go back" is found true. And those who would help souls to advance while in this state must see more in it than melancholy of temperament or God's punishment; otherwise they may make those whom they would encourage lose heart.⁵

About directors St. Teresa has the same thing to say as St. John of the Cross.

³ Matt. 7: 14.

⁴ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 10.

⁵ Cf. what St. John of the Cross has to say on the subject in the prologue to *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*.

So then, it is of great consequence that the director should be prudent—I mean, of sound understanding—and a man of experience. If, in addition to this, he is a learned man, it is a very great matter. But if these qualities cannot be found together, the first two are the most important, because learned men may be found with whom we can communicate when it is necessary. . . . My opinion has always been, and will be, that every Christian should continue to be guided by a learned director if he can, and the more learned the better. They who walk in the way of prayer have the greater need of learning; and the more spiritual they are, the greater is that need.⁶

We do well, then, to choose a learned and experienced director; if such cannot be found, then a well instructed and virtuous priest; and if he cannot be had, a pious even though ignorant priest who will have the humility to recognize his own limitations and to encourage us on occasion to consult others better informed than he is. According to St. Teresa, such a man is to be preferred to those with some learning who wish to seem to know it all, setting themselves up as judges of things they know nothing about and either leading souls astray or blocking their advancement.

Besides having a good director, souls in this state should follow the advice of St. John of the Cross when he says: "It is well for those who find themselves in this condition to take comfort, to persevere in patience and to be in no wise afflicted. Let them trust in God, who abandons not those that seek Him with a simple and right heart, and will not fail to give them what is needful for the road, until He bring them into the clear and pure light of love. This last He will give them by

⁶ *Life*, by herself. Chap. 13, ed. Burke (N.Y.: Columbus Press, 1911).

means of that other dark night, that of the spirit, if they merit that He should bring them thereto."⁷

In aridity and powerlessness we must not become discouraged nor abandon prayer, saying that it has become useless and fruitless. All spiritual writers tell us that at this time we have to persevere in humble, trusting prayer and keep on mortifying our inordinate inclinations. But some authors say all this somewhat sadly with an ascetic air indicating that the direction we are to take is along the line of mere duty, without showing us that prolonged aridity marks the beginning of a new life, that we have come upon the bitter roots of a tree that bears sweet fruit. We must have recourse to prayer and mortification more than ever before to help us overcome present difficulties. This we must do because these very difficulties indicate the germinating of the mystical life within us. And so it is without any sadness but with real joy that an experienced director will encourage us to enter into the strait way that will, for faithful hearts, widen out into the immensity of God Himself.

This time of trial is a time for making generous acts of faith, trust, and love, for we find ourselves in the happy necessity of being unable to confine ourselves to imperfect acts of these virtues. Let us not forget St. Thomas' doctrine that generous acts of charity obtain an immediate increase of charity, but imperfect acts (*actus remissi*) do not. The man who has five talents and acts as if he had only two does not immediately obtain a sixth; he receives it when he acts to the full power within him.

If we are not to lose ground during the night of the senses, we must begin to love God with all our strength, no longer

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

by the virtues alone but by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Then our strength will be the strength of ten. Far from giving up or shortening prayer, although it seems to have become useless, the beginner must often appeal to God, saying: "Lord, save me, keep my patience; make me do what You command, and command me to do what You will."

Sensible fervor doubtless is lost at this time, but normally substantial devotion greatly increases, for it proceeds from the virtue of religion and the gift of piety; the losses of the senses leave untouched the will's readiness to serve God: "the will to do promptly what pertains to the service of God."⁸ The illuminative way is dawning and is well worth the trouble required for entering into it. Men climb the Alps and risk their lives to stand on Mt. Blanc and look down on the glaciers. We should be willing to accept much to enter into true intimacy with God.⁹

A third step in our inquiry deals with the question whether souls in this state can persevere patiently in prayer when they find meditation impossible. St. John of the Cross advises them what to do:

The way in which they are to conduct themselves in this night of the sense is to devote themselves not at all to reasoning and meditation, since it is not the time for this, but to allow the soul to remain in peace and quietness, although it may seem clear to them that they are doing nothing. . . . The truth is that they will be doing quite sufficient if they have patience and persevere in prayer without making any effort. What they must do is merely to leave the soul free and disencumbered and at rest from all knowledge and thought, troubling not themselves, in that state,

⁸ Cf. *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, q. 82, a. 1.

about what they think or meditate, but contenting themselves with no more than a peaceful and loving attentiveness toward God.¹⁰

A little earlier, when speaking about those who desire to return to meditation, St. John of the Cross remarks:

This effort they make not without great inward repugnance and unwillingness on the part of their soul, which was taking pleasure in being in that quietness and ease, instead of working with its faculties. So they have abandoned one pursuit, yet draw no profit from the other; for, while they seek what is prompted by their own spirit, they lose the spirit of tranquillity and peace which they had before. And thus they are like to one who abandons what he has done in order to do it over again, or to one who leaves a city only to re-enter it, or to one who is hunting and lets his prey go in order to hunt it once more. This is useless here, for the soul will gain nothing further by conducting itself in this way, as has been said.

We give ourselves profitless trouble when we try to move against the current of grace instead of going with it. It is as if we were to go on looking for the source of living water when we already stand on the water's edge; we will be certain to go past it if we do not give up searching. It is as if we wished to keep on spelling out words when we know how to read and can take in a whole line at a glance. We are struggling downhill instead of letting God lift us up to the heights.

Spiritual persons who find themselves in prolonged sensible aridity and are not conscious of any recent outstanding fault, may conclude that they are gaining and not losing by being deprived of sensible fervor and that, although they

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.*

cannot feel it, grace is being accorded to them in another higher and more spiritual form.

St. John of the Cross makes a fourth observation¹¹ that relates to those who do not exactly wish to return to discursive meditation but who would like to feel some consolation again:

What they must do is merely to leave the soul free and disencumbered and at rest from all knowledge and thought, troubling not themselves, in that state, about what they think or meditate, but contenting themselves with no more than a peaceful and loving attentiveness toward God, and in being without anxiety, without the ability and without desire to have experience of Him or to perceive Him. For all these yearnings disquiet and distract the soul from the peaceful quiet and sweet ease of contemplation which is here granted to it. . . .

Let them remain in peace, as there is no question save of their being at ease and having freedom of spirit. For if such a soul should desire to make any effort of its own with its interior faculties,¹² this means that it will hinder and lose the blessings which, by means of that peace and ease of the soul, God is instilling into it and impressing upon it. It is just as if some painter were painting or dyeing a face; if the sitter were to move because he desired to do something, he would prevent the painter from accomplishing anything and would disturb him in what he was doing. And thus, when the soul desires to remain in inward ease and peace, any operation and affection or attention wherein it may then seek to indulge will distract it and disquiet it and make it conscious of aridity and emptiness of sense. For the more a soul endeavors to

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² That is, any effort outside the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in which it should rest. The description of the state given here by St. John of the Cross shows that it corresponds to St. Teresa's "Fourth Mansion."

find help in affection and knowledge, the more will it feel the lack of these, which cannot now be supplied to it upon that road.

This passage is psychologically profound, revealing how natural activity, when exerted contrary to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, serves as an obstacle to their delicate inspirations. We must not desire to feel God's gift but seek to receive it with docility in the obscurity of faith; then it will bear fruit. Aristotle says that as youth has its bloom, so has every act its pleasure; we must seek not pleasure but the object and end of the virtuous act itself; peace or the tranquillity of order will follow, bringing with it a pure joy which, though not the end of the act, is its result.¹³

Having seen what souls should not do, that they ought not to attempt to go back to discursive meditation and to experiencing feelings, we should next find out what positive action is to be taken. St. John of the Cross tells us:

Wherefore it behooves such a soul to pay no heed if the operations of its faculties become lost to it; it is rather to desire that this should happen quickly. For, by not hindering the operation of infused contemplation that God is bestowing upon it, it can receive this with more peaceful abundance, and cause its spirit to be enkindled and to burn with the love which this dark and secret contemplation brings with it and sets firmly in the soul. For contemplation is naught else than a secret, peaceful and loving infusion from God, which, if it be permitted, enkindles the soul with the spirit of love.¹⁴

At the beginning of the same chapter, the holy doctor says that in this way God brings the soul from meditation to contemplation, that is, to infused contemplation, there be-

¹³ Cf. Ia, IIac, q. 4, a. 2, c. et ad 3.

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

ing no question here of acquired contemplation but only of the infusion of the sweet light of life. The soul should, in other words, content itself with "a peaceful and loving attentiveness toward God."¹⁵ The general and obscure knowledge of His presence which God infuses into the soul is superior to every sense image and distinct idea; it reaches the spirit quickening the letter of the Gospel, discovers the treasure it contains, and fulfills our Lord's words: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you."¹⁶

These words were not addressed only to the apostles, for in his first epistle St. John writes to the faithful: "As for you, let that which you have heard from the beginning, abide in you. . . . You also shall abide in the Son. . . . Let the unction, which you have received from Him, abide in you . . . as His unction teacheth you of all things."¹⁷

At first sight it may seem that, if we find ourselves in like circumstances, we should do nothing; in reality, the Gospels we have read and meditated on so often will communicate their spirit to us, opening up the rich treasure of their meaning and giving us what apostles particularly need to be fit ministers not of the letter but of the spirit of the New Testament.¹⁸ Every Christian, too, must, in a sense, become truly interior and have some depth of understanding of Christ's words, our "spirit and life."¹⁹ Infused prayer begins with a spiritual lifting up of our souls to God in a way senses and

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ John 14: 26.

¹⁷ I John 2: 24, 27.

¹⁸ II Cor. 3: 6.

¹⁹ John 6: 64.

reasoning cannot reach; it is adoration in spirit and in truth, surpassing all figures of the imagination and formulas of reason, arriving at the divine reality which they seek to express, attaining to that infinite and diffusive goodness from which all life comes.

When we are undergoing the passive purification of the senses which takes place, according to St. John of the Cross, at the beginning of the illuminative way,²⁰ the conduct we should follow is then indicated for us. However, a difficulty remains to be cleared up. Suppose the soul has no such general and obscure knowledge of God, should it then return to discursive meditation, giving itself, for example, to the consideration of our Savior's passion or slowly reflecting on the petitions of the Our Father?

To resolve the difficulty proposed, a commentary was added to early editions of *The Dark Night* after the tenth chapter of Book I. No manuscript contains the commentary. Instead of recourse to an interpolation of this kind, it is quite simple to call attention to the fact that St. John of the Cross himself met the objection in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* with the following solution. He says:

With regard to what has been said, there might be raised one question—if progressives (that is, those whom God is beginning to bring into this supernatural knowledge of contemplation whereof we have spoken) must never again, because of this that they are beginning to experience, return to the way of meditation and argument and natural forms. To this the answer is that it is not to be understood that such as are beginning to experience this loving knowledge must never again, as a general rule, try to return to meditation; for, when they are first gaining in proficiency,

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

the habit of contemplation is not yet so perfect that whensoever they wish they can give themselves to the act thereof, nor, in the same way, have they reached a point so far beyond meditation that they cannot occasionally meditate and reason in a natural way, as they were wont. . . .

The soul, then, will frequently find itself in this loving or peaceful state of waiting upon God without in any way exercising its faculties—that is, with respect to particular acts—and without working actively at all, but only receiving. In order to reach this state, it will frequently need to make use of meditation, quietly and in moderation.²¹

To meditate slowly on the Our Father or on some verses from the Gospel serves as an excellent preparation for receiving a general and obscure knowledge of God, the beginning of infused contemplation.

In her *Life* St. Teresa describes how the noria, or water wheel, which symbolizes human effort under grace, has to be put to use during the beginning of the prayer of quiet, although the prayer of quiet is God's gift and lies beyond the attainment of all the soul's efforts,²² bringing with it some knowledge of the bliss of glory, giving new strength to the virtues, and manifesting a new and special work of God in the soul.²³ In other words, it indicates a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost higher than ordinary actual grace. St. Teresa's words about the noria as typifying the initial degree of the prayer of quiet agree exactly with what St. John of the Cross says about the work of the understanding in preparing the soul for deeper recollection and for what will be given

²¹ Bk. II, chap. 15.

²² These words show that the prayer of quiet is infused although the mind can prepare itself to receive it.

²³ Chap. 14.

to it during the passive night of the senses, the beginning of infused contemplation.

The principal rules of direction for the state of purification having now been outlined, we still have to investigate its effects; for a tree is judged by its fruits, and the fruit of this tree is abundant and full of flavor. The accompanying trials, the temptations allowed by God to provoke the soul to energetic reaction and to the firm establishment of the virtues having their seat in the sensuous appetency, must also be considered. To find out precisely when the passive purification of these senses ordinarily takes place is another task that lies ahead.

Even now it is already evident how much this purgation achieves in making the soul holy and wholesome and the way in which it brings to pass our Lord's words, "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!"²⁴ Blessed are they who will not let the difficulties of the way discourage them; with every forward step they make their hearts burn more and more ardently for God and they sing the song of the Psalmist with their whole soul: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God? . . . Send forth Thy light and Thy truth: they have conducted me, and brought me unto Thy holy hill, and into Thy tabernacles. And I will go in to the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth. To Thee, O God my God, I will give praise upon the harp."²⁵

What is expressed here is not merely the conditional and

²⁴ Matt. 7: 14.

²⁵ Ps. 41: 1 f.; 42: 3-5.

inefficacious desire to see the First Cause, the furnace of life from which creation flames up;²⁶ it is an increasingly pressing and burning supernatural desire enkindled in the heart by the Holy Ghost Himself. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill." Even in this life they shall know true intimacy with God.

²⁶ Cf. Ia, q. 12, a. 1.

CHAPTER III

EFFECTS OF THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES

Following the lead of St. Gregory the Great¹ and Hugo of St. Victor,² Tauler has touched on this subject many times in his *Sermons*,³ and St. John of the Cross has given it a searching treatment in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth chapters of the first book of *The Dark Night*. To acquire an exact knowledge of his doctrine on the matter, a useful procedure is to give special consideration to the results effected as he indicates them: purification of the sensuous appetency, knowledge of self, knowledge of God, humility, a great increase of divine charity, and the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost.

Purification of the sensuous appetency

The soul is freed from the necessity of seeking God by the weak, limited, and defective operations proper to the senses, which serve as means of transposing the disorder of the seven capital sins into the order of spiritual things.⁴ At the beginning of the interior life, the soul desires sensible consolations somewhat as if they were not simply a minor means

¹ *Moral.*, XXIV, chap. 6, no. 11; X, chap. 10, no. 17. In *Ezech.*, Bk. II, hom. 2, nos. 2, 3, 13.

² *Hom. 1 in Eccl.*

³ Tauler's teaching on this point has been collected from different sermons and arranged in the *Institutions*, chaps. 8 and 35, by his disciples.

⁴ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 11.

of the spiritual life, but its end; for the soul is still in the infancy of its spiritual life, and infants are greedy for milk. Sometimes consolations have even had a disturbing, although involuntary, echo in the lower senses. The soul, with something like avarice, desires to hold on to everything conducive to sensible devotion and, if deprived of it, falls into spiritual sloth, impatience, and anger or it may even come to envy its neighbor's graces. Sensible consolations often lead to pride because the soul that has them is likely to think itself well on the way to perfection and to judge others with severity and a somewhat bitter zeal.

The night of the senses quenches sensible inclinations and, because of its darkness, puts an end to the habit of using reason, together with the imagination, in interior prayer. The purification of the senses, at first sight seemingly such a loss, is in reality the best thing that could happen to any soul. Deprived of the milk of infants, it can then begin to live on the bread of the strong. When the capacity to take pleasure in sensible things has dried up in the soul, God begins to communicate Himself to it by infused contemplation, His primary and principal benefit to it and the source from which all others are derived.⁵

The senses are subdued, reformed, silenced; they can no longer enjoy any taste or relish of a sensible kind, whether high or low. The force of inordinate passion has spent itself in emptiness and darkness and a blessed spiritual sobriety comes to take its place and marks the beginning of peace. Times of aridity dull the natural sensitive appetite. The interior faculties leave off reasoned meditation and, together with the senses, are ruled by a higher harmony and lead be-

⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

yond sensible delights and the letter of God's word to its spirit, which lies outside and above the reaches of all human poetry, however marked by genius.⁶

This is the first and principal benefit caused by this aridity and dark night of contemplation: the knowledge of oneself and of one's misery . . . these aridities and this emptiness of the faculties compared with the abundance which the soul experienced aforesaid and the difficulty which it finds in good works, make it recognize its own lowliness and misery, which in the time of its prosperity it was unable to see. . . . Wherefore the soul knows the truth that it knew not at first, concerning its own misery; for, at the time when it was clad as for a festival and found in God much pleasure, consolation and help, it was somewhat more satisfied and contented, since it thought itself to some extent to be serving God. . . . But, now that the soul has put on its other and working attire—that of aridity and abandonment—and now that its first lights have turned into darkness, it possesses these lights more truly in this virtue of self-knowledge, which is so excellent and necessary.⁷

Notice that this self-knowledge, so remarkably deeper than any that results from mere examination of conscience, is, according to St. John of the Cross, an effect of awakening infused contemplation. He certainly believes that infused contemplation, as also the self-knowledge accompanying it, belongs to the normal way of sanctity. At this period of development the soul begins to know in a quasi-experimental fashion what both St. Augustine and St. Thomas have taught us, that our own efforts cannot make God's grace efficacious, but God's grace itself both arouses and sustains our efforts.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

The soul comes to realize that it does nothing and can do nothing of itself; that it is nothing; and so it takes no satisfaction in itself and this, "together with the soul's affliction at not serving God, is considered and esteemed by God as greater than all the consolations which the soul formerly experienced and the works which it wrought, however great they were, inasmuch as they were the occasion of many imperfections and ignorances."⁸ St. John of the Cross tells us that the other benefits following on aridity have their source in self-knowledge.

The gift of knowledge evidently effects all this, for it judges things, not like wisdom, by their highest cause, but by their secondary, proximate causes. Its special function is to show us especially that the disordination of sin cannot come from God, but must come from deficient causes, from ourselves, our defectibility, self-love, and radical egoism. Tears of true contrition flow from this supernatural knowledge given by the Holy Ghost.⁹ In its light, St. Benedict Joseph Labre used to begin his confessions by saying, "Have pity on me, I beg you, Father. I am a great sinner."

Those who have received much, who have been filled to overflowing, see revealed the relative gravity of faults that would be slight in others less illumined. The more we see of God's greatness, the more we realize the absolute and infinite gravity of mortal sin, the attempt to snatch from God His dignity as last end by turning away from Him; the more, too, we perceive the relative gravity of certain dangerous faults which, although venial in themselves, may proximately dispose us for a mortal fall. In the light of the gift of knowledge

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 9, a. 2 et 4.

our eyes are opened to our own misery, and we understand in what a singularly fragile vessel we bear the infinitely precious treasure of grace and of the indwelling Trinity.

A higher knowledge of God always accompanies a deeper knowledge of self. They are, St. Catherine of Siena says, the highest and lowest points of an ever-growing circle; if we see one of these clearly we see the other by contrast, for these two kinds of knowledge grow together. As St. Augustine expresses it, "*Noverim te, noverim me.*"

He who knows how powerless he is to do good and to persevere until death, knows by contrast and as if experimentally, how good and almighty is God, and how wonderful His grace, which owes its efficacy not to our consent but to itself. "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will," St. Paul says.¹⁰ Elsewhere, after he had heard our Savior's words, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity," he goes on to say, "For when I am weak, then am I powerful."¹¹ When the soul experiences its own weakness and cries out to God, it becomes strong in His help and, "though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen . . . (the) eternal."¹²

Growth in knowledge of our own weakness reveals to us the contrasting and infinite greatness of almighty God. And,

as St. John of the Cross expresses it, the soul learns to commune with God with more respect and courtesy than it showed to Him in times of pleasure and consolation.

For that pleasant favour which it experienced made its desire towards God somewhat bolder than was fitting, and discourteous and ill-considered. Even so did it happen to Moses, when he felt that God was speaking to him . . . he was making bold to go to Him, if God had not commanded him to stay and put off his shoes. When Moses had obeyed . . . he became so discreet and so attentive that the Scripture says that not only did he not make bold to draw near to God, but that he dared not even look at Him. . . . Even so likewise the preparation which God granted to Job in order that he might speak with Him consisted not in those delights and glories which Job himself reports that he was wont to have in his God, but in leaving him naked upon a dunghill. . . . And then the Most High God, He that lifts up the poor man from the dunghill, was pleased to come down and speak with him face to face . . . in a way that He had never done in the time of his prosperity.¹³ Then in the time of his testing, the saint answered his Lord: I know that thou canst do all things, and no thought is hid from thee. . . . Therefore I have spoken unwisely, and things that above measure exceeded my knowledge. . . . Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes.¹⁴

The Scripture says, "Then shall thy light rise up in darkness."¹⁵ In the darkness of the night of the senses a light dawns that shows the soul its misery and God's infinite greatness, a light that tests and frees and purifies the soul, for by it the soul comes to know God, and then God teaches it His wisdom, as He did not do in the days of its first delights and

¹⁰ Phil. 2: 13.

¹¹ II Cor. 12: 10.

¹² II Cor. 4: 17.

¹³ *Loc. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. 12.

¹⁴ Job 42: 1 ff.

¹⁵ Isa. 58: 10.

satisfactions.¹⁶ "The soul habitually has remembrance of God, with fear and dread of backsliding upon the spiritual road . . . the soul is purified and cleansed of the imperfections that were clinging to it because of the desires and affections, which of their own accord debilitate and darken the soul."¹⁷

A knowledge of God, springing from living faith and enlightened by the gifts, strengthens the virtues very much, especially humility, hope, and charity, as St. John of the Cross makes clear to us:

Likewise the soul draws from the aridities and voids of this night of the desire, spiritual humility, which is the contrary virtue to the first capital sin, which, as we said, is spiritual pride. Through this humility, which is acquired by the said knowledge of self, the soul is purged from all those imperfections whereinto it fell with respect to that sin of pride, in the time of its prosperity. For it sees itself so dry and miserable, that the idea never even occurs to it that it is making better progress than others, or outstripping them, as it believed itself to be doing before. On the contrary, it recognizes that others are making better progress than itself. . . . It is aware only of its own wretchedness, which it keeps before its eyes to such an extent that it never forgets it, nor takes occasion to set its eyes on anyone else. This was described wonderfully by David, when he was in this night, in these words: "If I was dumb and was humbled . . ." This he says because it seemed to him that the good that was in his soul had so completely departed. . . .

In this condition, again, souls become submissive and obedient upon the spiritual road, for, when they see their own misery, not only do they hear what is taught them, but they even desire that anyone soever may set them on the way and tell them what they

¹⁶ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

ought to do. The affective presumption which they sometimes had in their prosperity is taken from them.¹⁸

We begin to get a deep understanding of the beatitude, *Beati pauperes spiritu*. Spiritual humility, the fruit of nascent infused contemplation, far surpasses the humility produced in us by examination of conscience and meditation on the chief duties of our state of life. St. Teresa so informs us in her *Life*, where she remarks the fact that, when souls begin to advance in virtue and then read in spiritual books an account of all they must do to be perfect, they lose heart. She says: "For instance, they read that we must not be troubled when men speak ill of us, that we are to be then more pleased than when they speak well of us; that we must despise our own good name, be detached from our kindred . . . with many other things of the same kind. *The disposition to practice this must be, in my opinion, the gift of God*; for it seems to me a supernatural good, contrary to our natural inclinations."¹⁹ At another time she observes that we can spend years of prayer and retain certain bad habits, such as standing on our dignity and possessions, whereas perfect prayer rids us of them.²⁰

All interior souls, not merely those in the purely contemplative life like the Carmelites, but those in the mixed or apostolic life and even those in the active life, should make such progress that they are at last free of such faults. For all of them, infused contemplation, which alone can produce such fruits, belongs to the normal way of sanctity, although it may be accorded earlier to some, later to others, in an evident way

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

¹⁹ *Life*, chap. 31.

²⁰ *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 13.

to one and in a less manifest form to another, according to the vocation of each and God's own good pleasure.

Spiritual humility being united to confidence in prayer, the petitions of the psalms are no longer words used more or less mechanically but become truly the soul's spirit and life: "I cried to the Lord with my voice. . . . In the day of my trouble I sought God with my hands lifted up to Him in the night, and I was not deceived. Thy way, O God, is in the holy place: who is the great God like our God? Thou art the God that dost wonders."²¹ Humble and trusting prayer obtains patience and long-suffering, virtues needful in dryness and emptiness, when we must learn to persevere in spiritual exercises without either consolation or attraction.²²

At the same time the soul grows in charity because it no longer acts for any satisfaction of its own but simply and solely for God's sake and "often, in the midst of aridity and hardship, God communicates to the soul, when it is least expecting it, the purest spiritual sweetness and love, together with a spiritual knowledge which is sometimes very delicate, each manifestation of which is of greater benefit and worth than those which the soul enjoyed aforesaid; although in its beginnings the soul thinks that this is not so, for the spiritual influence now granted to it is very delicate and cannot be perceived by sense."²³

This period marks the evident passage of the soul from affective charity, content with saying "Lord! Lord!" to effective charity, the orientation of the whole of life toward God. The soul enters into His kingdom, has true conformity

²¹ Ps. 76: 2 f., 14 f.

²² *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 13.

²³ *Ibid.*

to the divine will in suffering as well as in joy, and loves with a will nourished by the hard bread of tribulation as well as by the milk of consolation.

Love for God, growing together with love of neighbor, gradually takes first place in the soul, thanks to the spirit of sacrifice, which destroys whatever is inordinate within us and makes us love the destruction which God Himself works there. The spirit of sacrifice brings us peace, the tranquillity of the order of charity, wherein we truly love God more than ourselves and above all things. And the Lord begins to rule completely all our affections, purifying, ennobling, and supernaturalizing them, and making us love everything lovable in Him. "Finally, inasmuch as the soul is now purged from the affections and desire of sense, it obtains liberty of spirit, whereby in ever greater degree it gains the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit."²⁴ To enumerate them is to reveal to ourselves what God's kingdom within us should be like; it should reign in "charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity."²⁵

Gradually the soul triumphs over its three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; with the Psalmist it can say of the grievous state through which it has come: "I am brought to nothing, and I knew not. I am become as a beast before Thee: and I am always with Thee. Thou hast held me by my right hand: and by Thy will Thou hast conducted me, and with Thy glory Thou has received me. For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth? . . . But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gal. 5: 22.

hope in the Lord God: that I may declare all Thy praises."²⁶

These are the chief effects of the passive purification of the senses, the purpose of which is to spiritualize in some way the life of the senses, subordinating them to the spirit. The passive purification of the soul aims to bring about the entire supernaturalization and complete submission of the soul to God, making it, so to say, deiform and preparing it for divine union in this life, a union which is the normal prelude, for those who become perfect, of the eternal union of life everlasting.²⁷

²⁶ Ps. 72: 22.

²⁷ St. Catherine of Siena teaches the same doctrine in the third chapter of her *Dialogue*.

CHAPTER IV

TRIALS ORDINARILY ACCOMPANYING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES

In discussing any interior state, we must distinguish between its essential character and the phenomena frequently accompanying it. Supernatural words, visions, and ecstasy may, for example, occur together with mystical union without formally constituting it, since the latter continues after these transitory phenomena have passed away. The same is true in regard to the afflictions so commonly associated with the passive purification of the senses. It takes place because of the withdrawal of sensible grace and the purely spiritual influx of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially the gifts of knowledge and fortitude. The former shows us the emptiness of things created; the latter makes us hunger and thirst for justice.

In addition, usually come temptations against chastity and patience, permitted by God to provoke a vigorous reaction of these virtues so that they may grow strong, sink their roots more deeply in the sensitive appetite, and bring about its more complete purgation and fuller submission to reason and to grace. Other trials are sometimes joined to these, the loss of temporal goods, of fortune, of honors, and of friendships to which we have become too attached; sometimes, too, sickness is providentially sent to remind us that of ourselves we can do nothing.

We must here distinguish, as St. John of the Cross does,¹ between the accentuated form these afflictions take in the relatively few souls that God will afterward lead on through the night of the soul, and the mitigated way in which they are found in others.

But those who are very weak are kept for a long time in this night, and these He purges very gently and with slight temptations. Habitually, too, He gives them refreshments of sense so that they may not fall away, and only after a time do they attain to purity of perfection in this life, some of them never attaining to it. Such are neither properly in the night nor properly out of it; for, although they pass on no farther, yet, in order that they may be preserved in humility and self-knowledge, God exercises them for certain periods and at certain times in those temptations and aridities; and at other times and seasons He aids them with consolations, lest they should grow faint and return to seek the consolations of the world.²

We shall first point out these trials as they occur in a tempered form and then afterward in that accentuated mode which is a forerunner of the night of the soul in those friends of God who are to be led by Him to the full perfection of the Christian life.

The reason for the temptations of this period

To gain a good understanding of traditional doctrine on the subject, we should recall, as St. Thomas and most theologians teach, that we have in us, far below the purely spiritual or immaterial intellect and will, faculties like the animals', essentially united to the organism: the external senses, the

¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

² *Ibid.*

imagination and sensory memory, and the sensuous appetency, called concupiscible when tending toward a delectable sensible good, and irascible when it is bent on a sensible good difficult to attain. These are the two forms of sensitive appetite in both men and animals; from them arises the whole gamut of the different emotions, according to whether the sensible good is present or absent, and whether it appears to be obtainable or not. The concupiscible appetite gives rise to the contrary passions of love and hate, desire and aversion, joy and sadness; the irascible, to hope and despair, fear and daring, and anger.³

To moderate the passions according to the rule of right reason, man must, by repeated acts, acquire the virtues of temperance, sobriety, chastity, fortitude, and patience. The first three give the concupiscible appetite a share, as it were, in the light of reason; the last two discipline the irascible in the same way.

But Christians must live not only like reasonable beings but as sons of God, subordinating their passions to right reason as the philosophers conceive it, and also to the life of grace and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. This fact is why we receive at baptism the infused moral virtues of temperance, sobriety, chastity, fortitude, and patience. They give our sensitive appetite not merely a share in the light of reason but an entirely supernatural participation in God's inner life, as the strength of martyrs and the absolute purity of virgins consecrated to God make evident to us.

For the thorough purgation of the sensuous appetency, the acquired and the infused moral virtues must become rooted in it and work its progressive perfection, determining it to

³ *Summa*, Ia, q. 80, 81; Ia IIae, q. 23, a. 4; q. 25, a. 3, 4.

follow the rule of reason and of faith more closely and to forsake evil in the form of excess and of defect, not falling into foolhardiness or cowardice, lust or insensibility.

To fight temptations we have to make more energetic acts of the virtues, that they may penetrate deeply into the soil of the harrowed and upturned sensitive appetite and become fertile seeds of rational and divine life. Seen in this light, the struggle against temptation has something great and glorious about it. Lacking temptation, we often are content with less effort, with feeble virtuous acts that are without intensity and that are inferior to the degree of virtue we already possess, acting like clever but lazy people who let themselves be outstripped by others with less intelligence but more diligence. As we have already noted, St. Thomas holds that acts of this kind fail to increase the acquired virtue from which they proceed: only a more intense act of any virtue will win its increase.⁴ Hence, although the good but feeble acts of a just man are meritorious, they do not immediately obtain an increase of charity and of the infused virtues; this increase will be given to him by God only after he makes a more generous act, proportionate to the degree of the infused virtues he possesses.⁵ Besides, very weak acts of virtue indirectly dispose us for venial sin in the sense that they do not sufficiently oppose certain inordinate inclinations, which gradually develop and may end by getting the upper hand some day.

God permits us to be tempted but not beyond our strength aided by His grace; otherwise sin would be inevitable and no longer sin, as happens when reason is entirely obliterated by

⁴ Ia IIae, q. 52, a. 3.

⁵ IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 6, ad 1um.

a sudden uprush of violent passion. Although temptation stays within the limits of our strength, it makes us ill content with weak acts of virtue, for we must struggle with all our heart and strength, while begging for divine help. Because of this, if we are faithful to grace, we make very meritorious and sometimes even heroic acts, which deepen the acquired virtues and obtain for us an immediate and proportionate increase of the infused virtues.

The reason why temptation must come was told to Tobias by the angel Raphael: "And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."⁶ When we are tempted, we receive help in proportion to our need, but we must be on guard not to forfeit the grace given. "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall. . . . And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."⁷ God, who is faithful, will give us grace so that we will not be vanquished but win merit in the struggle. From Him comes our constancy and our profit in temptation. If the temptation comes from the devil, God makes his evil influence itself serve to purify our soul. Undoubtedly the devil could defeat us if he were allowed, but, in the words of Isaias, the Lord "giveth strength to the weary, and increaseth force and might to them that are not. Youths shall faint and labor, and young men shall fall by infirmity. But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."⁸

⁶ Tob. 12: 13.

⁷ I Cor. 10: 12.

⁸ Isa. 40: 29.

The soul grows hardy by passing through difficulties. Of course, we ought not to desire temptation, for it is not useful in itself, as a means to an end, but only accidentally, as an occasion for more earnest prayer and more generous effort.⁹ In this sense we well understand the saying in Ecclesiasticus, "What doth he know, that hath not been tried?"¹⁰ He is ignorant of his own weakness and misery; nor has he learned practically all that divine grace can accomplish in us. On the other hand, the man who is tempted knows his own frailty and learns to say with St. Paul, "For when I am weak, then am I powerful,"¹¹ because he gives up relying on himself and places his whole confidence in God. Therefore the apostle St. James tells us: "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing."¹²

St. Augustine says that He who permits the devil to tempt us accords us His mercy at the same time, giving us strength to fight and conquer, if we but humbly ask His help. Those who do not expose themselves to the scorching wind of pride but keep themselves humbly in the shadow of God's help are not burnt. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him."¹³

Our Lord Himself willed to be tempted so that He might teach us to be watchful and prudent in these difficult times,

⁹ IIIa, q. 41, a. 2, ad 2um.

¹⁰ Ecclus. 34: 9.

¹¹ II Cor. 12: 10.

¹² Jas. 1: 2.

¹³ Jas. 1: 12.

give us an example of generosity, increase our trust, and merit for us the help necessary for victory.¹⁴ We can understand why, out of jealousy, the devil tempts better people more directly,¹⁵ since he has a special interest in keeping them back so that they will not draw others forward with them; we understand, too, why he begins to tempt them in little things, hoping in this way to lead them on to grave sin.

We shall take time to consider especially temptations against chastity and patience; against chastity because these temptations disturb people most and because the virtue itself is one of the loveliest forms of temperance; against patience, because such temptations happen so often, since the purpose of patience is to make us bear our daily troubles in a rational and Christian manner, whereas we exercise fortitude, properly speaking, only in times of great danger.¹⁶

Concupiscence and grace

St. James speaks of the first type of temptation when he says: "But every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured. Then when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death. Do not err, therefore, my dearest brethren. Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration."¹⁷

According to this text, when temptation begins independently of the will, as long as concupiscence has not conceived, that is, as long as it has not obtained our consent, there is

¹⁴ IIIa, q. 41, a. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, a. 2.

¹⁶ IIa IIae, q. 123, 136.

¹⁷ Jas. 1: 14.

no sin; there can even be merit if the just man resists temptation immediately.¹⁸ But if concupiscence conceives, or obtains our consent, it brings forth sin, and when that sin is grave it does the soul to death by depriving it of the supernatural life of grace.

Souls that have never experienced these temptations are rare. St. Teresa is cited as an example because, when asked by her daughters about such things, she could not give them any counsel, being ignorant of this evil; therefore she sent them to other older sisters. St. Thomas, too, after a first victory won in his youth against one of these assaults, was delivered from them forever after so that he could attend more freely to the contemplation of the things of God and teach them to others.

On the contrary, many experience temptations of this kind, particularly during the passive purification of the senses. And as they already have a deep love for purity of body and soul, they are tortured interiorly, seeing their imagination sullied, their sensory appetite fanned and violently inflamed. St. John of the Cross tells us of this purgation: "It is wont to be accompanied by grave trials and temptations of sense, which last for a long time, albeit longer in some than in others. For to some the angel of Satan presents himself—namely, the spirit of fornication—that he may buffet their senses with abominable and violent temptations, and may trouble their spirits with vile considerations and representations which are most visible to the imagination, which things at times are a greater affliction to them than death."¹⁹

Not uncommonly, interior souls that have had a guarded

childhood and adolescence may pass many years with almost no trouble from the senses. Then a day comes when violent temptations surge up within them and last for months or even years, with intervals of calm. If the three signs of the night of the senses just described above are found in them, this new trial confirms the presence of the state of purgation. Souls going through this must not be discouraged, for they are beginning to live a higher spiritual life, and their director should give them firm assurance of this truth, exhorting them to bear themselves with courage.

St. Paul tells us of himself: "And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me. And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then am I powerful."²⁰ Similar cases are remarked in the lives of the fathers of the desert, of St. Jerome, St. Benedict, St. Catherine of Siena, Blessed Angela of Foligno, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and many other saints.

In explaining what St. Paul attested, St. Thomas says²¹ that a doctor often induces a less dangerous sickness to heal or prevent another that is more serious; for example, he may cure a convulsion by bringing on a fever. The Apostle shows us that the physician of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, acts

¹⁸ 1a IIae, q. 80, a. 3, ad 3um.

¹⁹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

²⁰ II Cor. 12: 7.

²¹ *Exposit. in II Epist. ad Cor.*, 12: 3.

in the same way. To rid us of serious spiritual maladies, or to immunize us against them, He permits most of His elect and even those who are not so holy to be much tried in the body; sometimes, to cure them of very grave sins, He even allows them to fall into lesser, though mortal, sins.

Of all sins, pride is the most serious. Charity unites us to God and is the root of all the virtues. Pride makes us desire our own excellence without subordinating it to God and thus it separates us from God and is therefore the root of all the vices. For this reason God resists the proud. And since, in some respects, the good run a greater risk of taking pride in themselves precisely because of the good to be found within them, God at times permits some fault or failing of theirs, mortal sin even, to interfere with the good that they might do. They are led in this way to humble themselves and to recognize that by their own strength they cannot stand. St. Thomas adds that St. Paul was allowed to be so tempted to keep him from becoming puffed up by his exceptional vocation, supernatural lights, apostolic works, virginity, and knowledge. In his testing God gave him a remedy to preserve him from pride.

If St. Paul took refuge in prayer at such times, what should we not do, who are so much weaker than he was? We know how he was answered. A sick man who is ignorant of the nature of his illness may beg the doctor not to prescribe some strong and painful remedy; but the doctor, who wishes him to recover his health, pays no attention to him. God acted thus in regard to St. Paul, not putting an end to his trial but giving him more than he asked—help to keep him from yielding and to make him triumph over temptation. “My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in in-

firmity.” St. Jerome says that we see God’s goodness in this, that He often refuses to grant us what we ask of Him only to give us something better, which we should prefer.

Besides prayer and work, a great devotion to Mary is recommended by spiritual authors to help us resist temptations against chastity. Blessed Grignon de Montfort gives a beautiful treatment of this subject in his treatise on *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.²² He tells us that our devotion to Mary should be interior, tender, holy, constant, and disinterested; that it consists in the perfect consecration of our entire selves to Jesus through Mary, a renewing of our baptismal vows and a deeding over to Mary of all that is communicable in our good works and prayers so that she may use them all to benefit souls according to her good pleasure.

Alluding directly to the passive purifications, Blessed Grignon adds: “It is true that we can attain divine union by other roads; but it is by many more crosses and strange deaths, and with many more difficulties, which we shall find it hard to overcome. We must pass through obscure nights, through combats, through strange agonies, over craggy mountains, through cruel thorns and over frightful deserts. But by the path of Mary we pass more gently and more tranquilly.

“We do find, it is true, great battles to fight, and great hardships to master; but that good Mother makes herself so present and so near to her faithful servants, to enlighten them in their darknesses and their doubts, to strengthen them in their fears, and to sustain them in their struggles and their difficulties, that in truth this virginal path to find Jesus Christ

²² Tr. Faber, rev. ed., *Montfort Fathers* (St. Anthony Guild Press: Paterson, N.J., 1941).

is a path of roses and honey compared with other paths.”²³

Mary gives us special protection against the wiles and temptations of the devil, helps us to draw much profit from our struggle, and makes the battle both easier and more meritorious for us: easier, because she joins forces with us; more meritorious, because she obtains for us the means to fight valiantly—by a greater charity, the very principle of merit.

The fruits of patience and meekness

As our contest with temptations against chastity implants the virtue itself more deeply in the sensory appetite, weakens the appetite’s inclination to concupiscence, and subordinates it more and more to right reason and grace, so the exercise of patience and meekness serves to discipline the other and easily irritated part of our sensory appetite, the irascible.²⁴ It is no wonder, then, that God so often allows temptations against the virtues of patience and mildness during the passive purification of the senses. We meet unforeseen and redoubled vexations, misfortunes, contradictions, and sometimes even persecutions, although we should take care not to exaggerate the importance of the latter. These experiences, in one degree or another, prove the truth of St. Paul’s words, “And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.”²⁵ At the very least, they will suffer to see sin preventing the coming of God’s kingdom in souls.

The way to true wisdom is wanting to none: it is the cross. Plato and Aristotle were of the opinion that few men would

²³ Part II, chap. 2, 5th motive.

²⁴ Cf. IIIa, q. 15, a. 2; IIa IIae, q. 136, a. 4, ad 4um.

²⁵ II Tim. 3: 12.

attain wisdom because the human means to reach it were not within the compass of all. Our Lord tells us, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” The cross, when carried with supernatural love and patience, teaches us more and more of the deep meaning of the mysteries of faith.

In St. Thomas’ words, “The principal act of fortitude is endurance, that is, to stand immovable in the midst of dangers rather than to attack them.”²⁶ Attack, with its strong and largely temperamental uprush of courage, is not the principal act of fortitude. Endurance, the restraint of fear by reason and will, is. To stand firm under assault, to pass through passion without any moral yielding to evil, to tire the adversary by force of constancy, belongs to heroism and marks the martyr. To control fear is more difficult than to moderate daring; to bear up under a present evil demands more of us than to rush out to meet one still ahead.

Now the chief act of fortitude, to endure or to stand firm, is found in a certain way in patience, not in regard to great dangers but in relation to our daily troubles; for patience makes us endure like Christians the sadness they cause us. Its companion virtue, meekness, restrains our anger, makes us masters of ourselves, and keeps us from answering sharply and hotly when people tell us the truth about ourselves. Thus it prepares us to receive the knowledge of the supreme truth, God.²⁷

Our Lord teaches us all this when He says, “Blessed are the meek; for they shall possess the land.” They shall possess first the land of their own souls, if we may so express it; be-

²⁶ IIa IIae, q. 123, a. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 157, a. 4.

cause meekness, by restraining anger in the midst of contradictions, gives us great self-possession inspired by faith, by love of God and of neighbor. All these virtues increase together when, instead of giving in to temptations of impatience and irritability, we resist them firmly. "Patience bears roses," says an old proverb. Because of patience, Job, when deprived of possessions and health alike, could still say, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away . . . blessed be the name of the Lord."²⁸ Analogously, we must practice patience in the night of the senses; it disposes us for the dawning of contemplation.

The crosses met in this period of the spiritual life are all the harder to bear when they come not only from the wicked but also from good people, particularly relatives and friends and those to whom we are especially devoted. When we are the only ones to suffer, we do well to remember our Lord's words, "But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other."²⁹ Meekness often wins an adversary to God, a greater victory than the defense of our own rights and a display of anger. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be made like him."³⁰ However, immediately after these words in the Book of Proverbs we read, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he imagine himself to be wise."³¹ When it is a question of the good of our adversary himself or the legitimate defense of the common good of family, country, or Church, then we do well to answer.³²

The baseless opposition of good people with good inten-

²⁸ Job 1: 21.

²⁹ Matt. 5: 39.

³⁰ Prov. 26: 4.

³¹ Prov. 26: 5.

³² Cf. IIa IIae, q. 72, a. 3; q. 108, a. 1.

tions is particularly hard to bear; for it makes us ask ourselves whether those who grieve us, with their evident good will, have not genuine reasons for doing so. The more there are who judge us severely, the more this purgation hurts. St. Teresa went through such trials when priests and religious, some of them her own confessors, thought that she was deceived by the devil and began to estrange themselves from her. She suffered great anguish at this, the more so because in certain respects her humility made her judge herself even more harshly than her critics did.

The more we have done for friends and the more we have loved them, the harder it is to suffer persecution at their hands. "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him. But thou a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent."³³ Betrayal by a friend is one of the most trying things to bear, and the spirit of evil sometimes makes use of it to introduce the worst kind of divisions in the Church and in religious communities.

When we are wronged the temptation to curse presents itself.³⁴ At times the devil tries to lead us to blaspheme.³⁵ In Job's trials, his wife said to him: "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Curse God and die." To which he answered: "Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women: if we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?"³⁶

In the same way, after Tobias, a man of many charities, had

³³ Ps. 54: 13.

³⁴ IIa IIae, q. 76, a. 1.

³⁵ Cf. St. John of the Cross, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

³⁶ Job 2: 10.

become blind but continued to give thanks to God daily, his wife and friends came to him saying: "Where is thy hope, for which thou gavest alms, and buriedst the dead?" Tobias answered: "Speak not so; for we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from him. . . . Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just, and all Thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgment: And now, O Lord, think of me, and take not revenge of my sins, neither remember my offenses nor those of my parents."³⁷ Humility and compunction of heart, the fruit of trials like these, always speak in the same accents. Cursed by Semei, David answered forbearingly: "Let him alone that he may curse as the Lord hath bidden him. Perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction, and the Lord may render me good for the cursing of this day."³⁸

The opposition of well-intentioned superiors may cause souls their greatest sorrow during this period. Preoccupied with what they consider the common good, superiors may fail to appreciate spiritual attractions that come, nevertheless, from God. When this happens, we should, in a spirit of faith, recognize it as providential. Those who obey humbly and heroically in such times of testing show that they are being led by the spirit of God.³⁹

Humility and patience and meekness are necessary in these contradictions; and God lets us be proven in exactly this

³⁷ Tob. 2: 18; 3: 1.

³⁸ II Kings 16: 11.

³⁹ Obedience does not necessarily require conformity of the speculative judgment concerning the thing itself, such as a different interpretation of a doctrine, but it does demand conformity of the practical judgment and of the will to a superior's legitimate command. He himself might later change his mind and his successor might see things differently but as long as the order stands, our practical judgment must conclude: this is what I must do in the practical order.

way so that we may make very meritorious acts of these virtues and increase them tenfold by our exertion. The hail-storm that seems to be beating us down is really a rain of diamonds. When our Lord told His disciples that they would have much to suffer, He said too: "But a hair of your head shall not perish. In your patience you shall possess your souls."⁴⁰ "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven."⁴¹

As a matter of fact, later, after the apostles had been beaten with rods, they went out of the Sanhedrin "rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus."⁴² They accepted the cross not merely with resignation but with understanding and love, bearing their sufferings in such a way as to bring marvelous fruitfulness to their apostolate.

When we are put to the proof, we should say to God: "It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me."⁴³ And when calm returns, we shall see the fruit of our ordeal and can say to God: "O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee! Which Thou hast wrought for them that hope in Thee. . . . Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face, from the disturbance of men. Thou shalt protect them in Thy tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues. Blessed be the Lord. . . . But I said in the excess of my mind: I am cast away from

⁴⁰ Luke 21: 19.

⁴¹ Matt. 5: 10-12.

⁴² Acts 5: 41.

⁴³ Ps. 118: 71.

before Thy eyes. Therefore Thou hast heard the voice of my prayer, when I cried to Thee.”⁴⁴

What is said here of the purification of individuals is equally true of religious families, they being tried especially at the time of their foundation. Our Lord’s words must be fulfilled in both cases: “Everyone that heareth these My words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock. And everyone that heareth these My words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.”⁴⁵ Our Lord gives us an even more striking image of this purgation when, after saying, “I am the true vine; and My Father is the husbandman,” he adds: “. . . and every [branch] that beareth fruit, He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”⁴⁶

The time for the night of the senses

The last question to be considered concerning the passive purification of the senses is when it ordinarily takes place and how long it usually lasts in the spiritual life. Many modern authors treat of this question in chapters on the unitive way, as if it generally occurred after the soul had already entered there. Other authors, Vallgornera, for instance, discuss it at the end of the purgative way and take up the consideration

⁴⁴ Ps. 30: 20.

⁴⁵ Matt. 7: 24.

⁴⁶ John 15: 1.

of the night of the soul at the end of the illuminative way.⁴⁷

To discover which of these viewpoints represents the traditional one, we must consult the great masters who have themselves experienced such a purgation and have considered it in itself and for itself and not in relation to numberless irrelevancies connected with it. Among the masters, St. John of the Cross, recently declared a doctor of the Church, takes precedence because he has treated the problem *ex professo* and gone into the subject more thoroughly than anyone before him and deserves to be considered a faithful witness to tradition.

An attentive reading of St. John of the Cross reveals what Vallgornera saw so well, that, for him, the passive night of the senses is the normal transition from the purgative to the illuminative way, just as the night of the soul marks the passage from the illuminative to the unitive way.

In *The Dark Night* we read: “When this house of sensuality was now at rest—that is, was mortified—its passions being quenched and its desires put to rest and lulled to sleep by means of this blessed night of the purgation of sense, the soul went forth, to set upon the road and way of the spirit, which is that of progressives and proficients, and which, by another name is called the way of illumination or of infused contemplation, wherewith God Himself feeds and refreshes the soul, without meditation, or the soul’s active help. Such, as we have said, is the night and purgation of sense in the soul.”⁴⁸ Earlier, when explaining the third sign of the night

⁴⁷ Vallgornera, O.P., *Mystica theologia S. Thomae*, q. II, disp. viii; q. III, disp. vi. Father Regis Gerest, O.P., has adopted the same point of view in his modification and completion of Father Andre Mari Meynard’s *Traité de la vie intérieure* (Paris, 1923).

⁴⁸ Bk. I, chap. 14.

of the senses, St. John of the Cross says that infused contemplation begins during the period of transition from the purgative to the illuminative way.⁴⁹

Elsewhere in the same work we find another confirmation that this time marks the soul's progress from the purgative to the illuminative way: "The night of sense is common and comes to many; these are the beginners; and of this night we shall first speak. The night of the spirit is the portion of the very few, and these are they that are already practiced and proficient, of whom we shall treat hereafter."⁵⁰ Few souls are generous enough in fact to reach the full perfection of Christian life and to pass through the two purifications demanded by it.

St. John of the Cross always calls those undergoing the passive purification of the senses "beginners" and, as has been done traditionally ever since the time of Clement of Alexandria, he distinguishes them from the proficient and the perfect.⁵¹ St. Teresa's view is the same. In *The Interior Castle*, before taking up the subject of the prayer of quiet, she treats, at the end of the third mansions of sensible aridity, another designation for the night of the senses; later, at the beginning of the sixth mansions, she describes the night of the soul, a means of disposing the soul for a life of perfect union with God.

In her *Life*, after saying that she endured sensible dryness for many years and all that time considered it a mercy of God if she got but one drop of water from the well of consolation, she adds: "I believe that it is our Lord's good pleas-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 8.

⁵¹ Cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. 1, 9, 10; Bk. II, chap. 1; *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 12, 13.

St Marys Hospital Sisters.

ure frequently in the beginning, and at times in the end, to send these torments, and many other incidental temptations, to those who love Him."⁵² The words "and at times in the end" seem to correspond to a thought St. John of the Cross had that the senses are truly purified only when the purification of the soul has begun.⁵³

It seems an obvious mistake to maintain that St. John of the Cross gave a special meaning to the traditional terms "beginners," "proficients," and "perfect," and that those he calls beginners are beginners in the sense of starting out on the unitive way. The beginners St. John of the Cross talks about have the faults of real beginners, as we can see from his description of them.⁵⁴ He even says that some of them have two confessors, one to whom they relate their progress, another to whom they tell their failings: a thing they would not do if they had really reached the unitive way. St. John of the Cross takes these three terms in the traditional sense in which they have been used since the time of Clement of Alexandria, by St. Augustine, by St. Gregory the Great, and by St. Thomas. He accepts, too, the corresponding terms of purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, although he describes the latter two stages of the spiritual life not in any attenuated form but as they exist in their fullness.⁵⁵

The only comment that need be added is that interior souls not called to a purely contemplative life reach the illuminative way more slowly and, in many instances, the passive

⁵² Chap. 11.

⁵³ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. 2.

⁵⁵ Dom Chevallier, O.S.B., has recently made a critical study of the authentic text of *The Spiritual Cantic* of St. John of the Cross, confirming this point of view. A careful study of the Spanish text of *The Dark Night* leads to the same conclusion.

purgations are hidden in the ordinary sufferings of life or the trials of the apostolate.⁵⁶ The light of contemplation is less evident and more diffuse, yet quite real. The lives of saints devoted to the apostolate and to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy provide examples of this.

As to how long the night of the senses usually lasts, St. John of the Cross says:

For how long a time the soul will be held in this fasting and this penance of sense, cannot be told with any certainty; for all do not experience it after one manner, neither do all encounter the same temptations. For this is meted out by the will of God, in conformity with the greater or the smaller degree of imperfection which each soul has to purge away. In conformity, likewise, with the degree of love of union to which God is pleased to raise it, He will humble it with greater or less intensity or in greater or less time. Those who have the disposition and greater strength to suffer, He purges with greater intensity and more quickly.⁵⁷

The purification of others is not so hard but lasts longer.⁵⁸ Some never come to the end of it, alternating between consolation and aridity, both sent by God, for if He did not seem to withdraw from them, some souls would never draw nearer to Him.

In *The Living Flame*, when speaking of divine union as the end of purification, St. John of the Cross says:

And here it behooves us to note the reason why there are so few that attain to this lofty state of the perfection of union with God.

⁵⁶ *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 417.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

⁵⁸ Facts substantiate this statement that the length of time the passive purification lasts differs with different individuals. St. Teresa had to endure it for eighteen years; St. Francis of Assisi, for ten; St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, five years at first, and then later, sixteen; Blessed Henry Suso, ten years; St. Mary of Egypt, seventeen; and St. Rose of Lima, for an equal length of time. Cf. Card. Bona, *Via comp. ad Deum*, c. 10, no. 6.

It must be known that it is not because God is pleased that there should be few raised to this high spiritual state, for it would please Him that all souls should be perfect, but it is rather that He finds few vessels which can bear so high and lofty a work. For, when He proves them in small things and finds them weak and sees that they at once flee from labour, and desire not to submit to the least discomfort or mortification, He finds that they are not strong and faithful in the little things wherein He has granted them the favour of beginning to purge and fashion them, and sees that they will be much less so in great things; so He goes no farther with their purification, neither lifts them up from the dust of the earth, since greater constancy and fortitude would be necessary for this than they exhibit.⁵⁹

In her *Life*, St. Teresa, too, warns us that many begin to give themselves to the spiritual life but then make no further progress—although their failure saddens them—mainly because they have no love for the cross.⁶⁰ The same thought is repeated by all the masters of the spiritual life: Tauler, Blessed Henry Suso, St. Catherine of Siena. In her *Dialogue*, St. Catherine says that patience in time of trial is the sign of perfect love, the touchstone of true obedience, and the marrow of charity.

In answer to the question why good men never come to experience what he tells them of the wonderful things of God, Ruysbroeck says that they fail to respond to the divine motion by self-abnegation, care too little for self-knowledge, and also regard good works as more important than a right motive and love of God. They remain, therefore, exterior and complex.⁶¹

The Imitation summarizes this whole doctrine as follows:

⁵⁹ St. 2, v. 5.

⁶⁰ Chaps. 11, 22.

⁶¹ *The Book of Supreme Truth*, chap. 7.

“Why, then, art thou afraid to take up thy cross, which leadeth to the kingdom? In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection from enemies. In the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the cross is strength of mind; in the cross is joy of spirit. In the cross is height of virtue; in the cross is perfection of sanctity. . . . Take up, therefore, thy cross, and follow Jesus, and thou shalt go into life everlasting. . . . If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end.”⁶²

“And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to sequester themselves entirely from perishable creatures.”⁶³

St. Paul taught the same high spiritual wisdom: “For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.”⁶⁴

Blessed Grignon de Montfort speaks of the passive purifications to be encountered in the apostolate. Having said that eternal Wisdom communicates all Its light and the virtues and gifts in an eminent degree to those who possess the spirit of wisdom, he adds that Wisdom inspires them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. To prove them and make them worthy, Wisdom makes Its chief work the securing of great combats for them, laying up contradictions and crosses for them in almost everything

⁶² Bk. II, chap. 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, chap. 31.

⁶⁴ Rom. 8: 16-18.

that they undertake. Sometimes the devil is permitted to tempt them, the world to calumniate and despise them, their enemies to overcome them and cast them down, their friends and relatives to abandon and betray them. They lose some treasure, meet sickness and sadness, and know what it is to be faint of heart and tried at every turn. Yet the Holy Ghost says: “Their affliction is light and their reward will be great because God has proven them and found them worthy of Him. He has tried them like gold in a furnace; He has received them as a victim of holocaust and He will look upon them with favor when their time comes.”⁶⁵

Wisdom protects the just man against his enemies, defends him from seducers, and gives him a strong conflict so that he may overcome and know that wisdom is mightier than all.⁶⁶ And Wisdom, being a lovable sovereign, does all things according to number, weight, and measure, meting out crosses to friends only in proportion to their strength and pouring out so much sweetness on each cross that it becomes the delight of him who takes it up. Those who seek or possess eternal Wisdom, have the cross as their portion and reward.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wisd. 3: 3-6.

⁶⁶ Wisd. 10: 12.

⁶⁷ *Amour de la divine sagesse*, Pt. I, chap. 6.

CHAPTER V

THE UNION WITH GOD

ORDINARILY FOLLOWING THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES

Between the two nights of which St. John of the Cross speaks in his description of the soul's ascending journey toward perfect divine union, there is, as it were, a time of calm, when the soul keeps on advancing in the light without great difficulty or fatigue. Other spiritual authors speak of this period between what they call the second and third conversions. Father Lallemant, S.J., alludes to it several times in his beautiful book, *The Spiritual Doctrine*. The first conversion takes place when we renounce the spirit of the world to give ourselves to God, for example, on entering religion. Since the engrafted plant is apt to go back to its wild state, it must experience a second conversion, or as St. John of the Cross calls it, the night of the senses, during which our Lord Himself teaches us the emptiness of created things and the value of the one thing necessary. The third conversion, if it takes place in this life in such a way as to enable us to avoid purgatory, consists of the different degrees of the night of the soul, when the Lord enlightens us much more concerning our weakness and misery and His own infinite greatness.

The relatively calm period that takes place between the second and third conversions is what we wish to discuss now, following the teaching of St. John of the Cross and of St.

Teresa. They have both, in quite different ways, given exactness to what had already been said by St. Gregory, Hugh of St. Victor, Tauler, St. Catherine of Siena, the author of *The Imitation*, and many other great spiritual writers.

The view of St. John of the Cross

St. John of the Cross says:

When the house of sensuality was now at rest—that is, was mortified—its passions being quenched and its desires put to rest and lulled to sleep by means of this blessed night of the purgation of sense, the soul went forth, to set out upon the road and way of the spirit, which is that of progressives and proficients, and which, by another name, is called the way of illumination or of infused contemplation, wherewith God Himself feeds and refreshes the soul, without meditation, or the soul's active help. Such, as we have said, is the night and purgation of sense in the soul.¹

In the preceding chapter he had said that the soul is no longer

moved by the pleasure of attraction and sweetness which it finds in its work, but only by God. It likewise practices here the virtue of fortitude, because, in these difficulties and insipidities which it finds in its work, it brings strength out of weakness and thus becomes strong. . . .

It is no longer angry with itself and disturbed because of its own faults, nor with its neighbour because of his faults, neither is it displeased with God, nor does it utter unseemly complaints because He does not quickly make it holy.

Then as to envy, the soul has charity toward others in this respect also; for, if it has any envy, this is no longer a vice as it was before, when it was grieved because others were preferred to it

¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

and given greater advantage. Its grief now comes from seeing how great is its own misery, and its envy (if it has any) is a virtue, since it desires to imitate others, which is great virtue. . . .

Often, in the midst of these times of aridity and hardship, God communicates to the soul, when it is least expecting it, the purest spiritual sweetness and love, together with a spiritual knowledge which is sometimes very delicate, each manifestation of which is of greater benefit and worth than those which the soul enjoyed aforetime; although in its beginnings the soul thinks that this is not so, for the spiritual influence now granted to it is very delicate and cannot be perceived by sense.

Finally, inasmuch as the soul is now purged from the affections and desires of sense, it obtains liberty of spirit, whereby in ever greater degree it gains the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit.

These St. Paul enumerates as follows: "But the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity."² These fruits are, as St. Thomas teaches, acts proceeding from the influence of the Holy Ghost in us and bringing us a holy delight.³ They are, therefore, entirely different not only from the fruits of concupiscence but also from the fruits of simple reason, even when enlightened by faith, as in discursive meditation.

St. John of the Cross adds:

The soul which God is about to lead onward is not led by His Majesty into this night of the spirit as soon as it goes forth from the aridities and trials of the first purgation and night of sense; rather it is wont to pass a long time, even years, after leaving the state of beginners, in exercising itself in that of proficients. In the

² Gal. 5: 22.

³ *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. 70, a. 1, 2.

latter state it is like to one that has come forth from a rigorous imprisonment; it goes about the things of God with much greater freedom and satisfaction of the soul, and with more abundant and inward delight than it did at the beginning before it entered the said night. For its imagination and faculties are no longer bound, as they were before, by meditation and anxiety of spirit, since it now very readily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labour of meditation.

To prevent our thinking that this means the soul will no longer experience any dryness, St. John of the Cross immediately adds:

Although, as the purgation of the soul is not complete (for the principal part thereof, which is that of the spirit is wanting . . .), it is never without certain occasional necessities, aridities, darkneses and perils which are sometimes much more intense than those of the past, for those were as tokens and heralds of the coming night of the spirit, and are not lasting. . . . For, having passed through a period, or periods, or days of this night and tempest, the soul soon returns to its wonted serenity; and after this manner God purges certain souls which think not to rise to so high a degree of love as do others, bringing them at times, and for short periods, into this night of contemplation and purgation of the spirit, causing night to come upon them and then dawn.

The Imitation often speaks of the same thing.

A final remark made on the subject in *The Dark Night* says: "This sweetness, then, and this interior pleasure which we are describing, and which these progressives find and experience in their spirits so easily and so plentifully, is communicated to them in much greater abundance than aforetime, overflowing into their senses more than was usual pre-

vicious to this purgation of sense; for, inasmuch as the sense is now purer, it can more easily feel the pleasures of the spirit after its manner.”⁴

What St. John of the Cross has to say about the degrees or “cellars” of love contributes much to the clarification of this teaching. He writes: “And we may say that there are seven of these degrees or cellars of love, all of which the soul comes to possess when she possesses in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the manner wherein she is able to receive them.”⁵ These seven cellars or cells of the soul remind us of St. Teresa’s seven mansions, which also correspond to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, as Isaias ranked them in descending order: “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.”⁶

In the night of the senses, as we have seen, the gifts of knowledge and of fear of the Lord have most prominence, making plain to us the emptiness of created things and strengthening us against the frequent temptations of this same period. In the night of the soul we shall see the special working of the gifts of understanding and fortitude. In the transforming union the gift of wisdom is in most evident operation. The gifts of counsel and of piety dominate the time of calm after the night of the senses, and at this time the gift of knowledge serves less to reveal the emptiness of created things than their symbolism of the divine.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. I.

⁵ *The Spiritual Canticle*, st. 26.

⁶ Isa. 11: 2.

The gift of piety, as St. Thomas remarks,⁷ disposes us to receive docilely those inspirations producing in us an entirely filial affection for our Father in heaven, such as St. Paul speaks of in his Epistle to the Romans: “For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.”⁸

The gift of piety corresponds to the beatitude of the meek, for it leads us to see other men not as rivals but as God’s children and our brothers. The gift of counsel, the guide of true piety, corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful, since in difficult cases it inclines us more toward mercy than toward rigorous justice. The predominating influence of these two gifts imparts to the period under discussion its peculiar character of calm, the fruit of the passive purification of the senses. However, the soul has not reached the end of its upward journey, although those who have come so far may be carried away like St. Peter on Thabor and say: “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”⁹ As St. Mark goes on to say, “He knew not what he said.” And soon afterward our Lord foretold His passion, “It is written of the Son of man, that He must suffer many things and be despised.”¹⁰ The Passion finds its reflection in the purgation of soul which, for truly generous hearts, follows the period of calm spoken of here.

⁷ *IIa IIae*, q. 121, a. 1, 2.

⁸ Rom. 8: 15.

⁹ Mark 9: 5.

¹⁰ Mark 9: 11.

St. Teresa's testimony

For anyone who has studied St. Teresa's *Interior Castle* closely, it is apparent that the union with God enjoyed by the soul between the night of the senses and the night of the soul corresponds to the period covering the second phase of the fourth mansion and the whole of the fifth. The fourth mansion begins with "supernatural recollection" following a period of dryness¹¹ and often accompanied by the aridity characterizing the passive night of the senses.¹² Furthermore, the time of quiet following it may be arid because of the opposition encountered from the imagination and sensitive appetite.¹³

The life and works of St. Jane Frances de Chantal show that this arid quiet can last a long time. In it we find the two elements which, according to St. John of the Cross, are characteristic of the passive night of the senses: on one hand, the beginning of infused contemplation together with a strong desire for God and for perfection; and on the other, the deprivation of what we call sensible grace and of the facility or even of the ability to enlist the cooperation of the imagination and devote oneself to discursive meditation.

¹¹ Cf. Third Mansion, chap. 2.

¹² Cf. Fourth Mansion, chap. 1. When discussing supernatural or passive recollection, the beginning of infused prayer, St. Teresa speaks of the usefulness of temptations arising at that time and encourages those dismayed by their distractions during prayer, showing how these result from the fact that the imagination cannot cooperate in infused prayer as it formerly did in discursive meditation.

¹³ Fourth Mansion, chap. 1: "When this (the imagination), wanders we at once imagine that all the powers of the soul follow it; we think everything is lost, and that the time spent in God's presence is wasted. Meanwhile the soul is perhaps entirely united to Him in the innermost mansions, while the imagination is in the precincts of the castle, struggling with a thousand wild and venomous creatures and gaining merit by its warfare." Cf. also *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 31, 34, 38.

At the beginning of her sixth mansion St. Teresa describes the night of the soul as follows:

I shall not enumerate these trials in their proper order, but will describe them as they come to my memory, beginning with the least severe. This is an outcry raised against such a person by those amongst whom she lives. . . . Persons she thought were her friends desert her, making the most bitter remarks of all. . . . Yet oh! the rest would seem trifling in comparison could I relate the interior torments met with here, but they are impossible to describe. . . . Let us first speak of the trial of meeting with so timorous and inexperienced a confessor that nothing seems safe to him; he dreads and suspects everything but the commonplace. . . . The poor soul, beset by the same fears, . . . feels a torture and dismay at his condemnation that can only be realized by those who have experienced it themselves. For one of the severe trials of these souls . . . is their belief that God permits them to be deceived in punishment for their sins . . . (their) fears become almost unbearable. Especially is this the case when such spiritual dryness ensues that the mind feels as if it never had thought of God nor ever will be able to do so.¹⁴

Anyone reading this chapter and meditating on it sees that it describes the night of the soul discussed by St. John of the Cross in the second book of *The Dark Night*. We understand, then, that the union with God enjoyed by the advanced or proficient between the two nights corresponds to the second phase of St. Teresa's fourth mansion: for these souls know a quiet of soul no longer arid but consoling, and when they enter her fifth mansion they experience some degree of simple union, whether complete or incomplete.

¹⁴ Sixth Mansion, chap. 1.

In the prayer of quiet the will alone is captivated.¹⁵ A mysterious light manifesting the goodness of its indwelling God together with the gift of piety, present in the will itself and disposing it for an entirely filial affection for God, achieves this work within it. This state of soul has been compared to a child at the breast.¹⁶ Better still, it is like possession of that living water of which Christ told the Samaritan woman. This water has its source in God yet it springs up in the inmost depths of our being, giving us great peace and sweetness, enlarging our hearts and our whole interior life, accomplishing such things within us that the soul itself cannot comprehend what it has received.¹⁷ In this state, however, the intellect, memory, and imagination are not captivated by the divine action. Sometimes they act as aids to the will and set themselves to serve it, at other times their cooperation causes it nothing but trouble.¹⁸

In her *Life*, St. Teresa uses the noria, a kind of water wheel, to symbolize the prayer of quiet. We remember the image she borrowed from the four ways of watering gardens: The first is by bucketing water from the well hand over hand, the symbol of discursive meditation.¹⁹ The second is by using the noria, a sort of water wheel or windlass that demands less effort than was required at the start to dispose us to receive God's grace; here, the saint says, the flowers of virtue are ready to appear.²⁰ The third is done by irrigation from a river or spring and corresponds to the sleep of the powers

¹⁵ St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *The Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansion, chap. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Chap. 11.

²⁰ Chap. 15.

captivated by God and unconscious of the things of the world; here the flowers of virtue blossom.²¹ Lastly, the watering is done by rain, symbol of the prayer of union, the source of heroic resolutions and of great growth in humility.²²

Progress in prayer is, therefore, generally accompanied by progress in virtue; in fact, living faith, charity, and the gifts accompanying them are exercised in prayer; for charity informs and animates, so to say, the other virtues resulting from it and increasing with it.²³ According to St. Teresa,²⁴ then, if the soul that has already reached the prayer of quiet is humble and generous, it will be raised still higher—to union. But the saint notes that regularity, a fidelity of a somewhat external kind, is not sufficient; we must have besides great docility to the Holy Ghost, because He requires more and more of us as He gives and desires to give us more.²⁵

In simple union the divine action is so strong that it completely absorbs the activity of the interior faculties of the soul during the time of prayer. Their entire activity is directed to God and no longer strays away from Him. Not only the will, but the intellect, too, is captivated by Him, and the natural operations of the memory and imagination come to a standstill so that the soul is usually no longer troubled by distractions, at least when it experiences complete union.

This fact explains why the higher faculties, the intellect and will, are positively captivated, fixed, and absorbed by God through the illumination and inspiration of the Holy

²¹ Chaps. 16, 17.

²² Chaps. 18, 19.

²³ *Ia Ilae*, q. 66, a. 2.

²⁴ *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansion, chap. 1.

²⁵ Fifth Mansion, chap. 1: "Outwardly we may appear to practice the requisite virtues, but we have far more to do than this before it is possible to attain to contemplation, to gain which we should neglect no means, either small or great."

Ghost necessary for infused loving contemplation. This losing of themselves in God is the eminent exercise of the supernaturalized intellect and will in this life. Intensity of contemplation and of union with God brings about a certain suspension of the natural exercise of the lower faculties (the imagination and sensory memory) and, as a result, of reason as well. This happens because the entire activity of the soul is directed toward God by the higher faculties and these exert a spiritual influence over the lower powers, which are stilled, as it were, and lulled to sleep. The absorbed scholar who abstracts his attention from external things to the extent of no longer seeing them offers us a parallel in the natural order.²⁶ The soul no longer makes any effort to get the health-giving, refreshing, and purifying waters but simply receives the rain as it falls from heaven,²⁷ God allowing it to cooperate with Him only by complete submission of will.²⁸ Yet we continue to merit, not that the vital will-act in such a case is the result of discursive meditation, but because it acts freely in its docility to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.²⁹

As St. Teresa says, "How beautiful is the soul after having been immersed in God's grandeur and united closely to Him but for a short time!"³⁰ By dying wholly to self such a soul

²⁶ The imagination would not be suspended in its activity but positively captivated if it were a case of an imaginary vision, which is sometimes granted in this state, although it is not at all essential to it. Suspension of the natural activity of the lower powers is not simply a consequence of the intensity of contemplation; it results from the fact that God in some way fetters these faculties as in rapture, so that they can give no trouble to the intellect and the will.

²⁷ *Life of St. Teresa* by herself, chap. 18.

²⁸ Fifth Mansion, chap. 1.

²⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 111, a. 2, for the difference between operating and cooperating grace. The act spoken of here is a result of operating grace.

³⁰ Fifth Mansion, chap. 2.

becomes so changed that its transformation is comparable to the metamorphosis of a silkworm into a white butterfly.³¹ In both instances, life reaches maturity only after a transformation. Thus we see why St. John of the Cross calls the period of the spiritual life which we have been discussing the age of the proficients or advanced.

It should be remarked, with St. Teresa,³² that the prayer of union is often incomplete, without cessation of the activity of the imagination and memory, these powers sometimes making war on the intellect and will.³³ Here again, as in the case of the prayer of quiet, we must pay no more attention to the imagination than we would to a fool. When treating of incomplete mystical union St. Teresa says: "Is it necessary, in order to attain to this kind of divine union, for the powers of the soul to be suspended? No; God has many ways of enriching the soul and bringing it to these Mansions besides what might be called a 'short cut.'"³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Life*, chap. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ The "short cut" together with its delights referred to here is sometimes taken for infused or mystical contemplation but consists only in the suspension of the imagination and memory, or the beginning of ecstasy, which sometimes accompanies mystical union and does much to facilitate it. It is plain, in fact, that the states of prayer referred to in the Fourth Mansion—supernatural recollection and the prayer of quiet—are infused. With all the more reason we can say the same thing of those in the Fifth Mansion. When starting to speak of these, St. Teresa herself told her daughters: "There are very few who never enter this mansion: some more and some less, but most of them may be said at least to gain admittance into these rooms. I think that certain graces I am about to describe are bestowed on only a few of the nuns, but if the rest only arrive at the portal they receive a great boon from God, for 'many are called, but few are chosen.'"

Among these "certain graces" is the "short cut" of the suspension of imagination and memory. On this point, cf. Arintero, O.P., *Cuestiones misticas*, 2nd ed., p. 330; P. Garate, S.J., *Razon y Fe*, July, 1908, p. 325; Saudreau, *Les degrés de la vie spirituelle*, 5th ed., II, 101, note 2.

The effects of the prayer of union are wonderfully sanctifying. The soul knows deep contrition for sin and a burning desire to praise and serve God; it suffers much to see sinners lost and catches a glimpse of the sufferings Jesus Christ endured; and it really begins to practice heroic virtue.³⁵

What distinguishes St. Teresa from St. John of the Cross is that she puts more stress than he does on the extraordinary favors which may accompany the different states of prayer. Yet she takes care not to confuse concomitant and accidental favors with the essential character of interior states, recognizing that certain graces are bestowed only on a few of those who gain admittance to the inner mansions.³⁶ Moreover, St. Teresa emphasizes the progressive extension of the mystical state to the different faculties of the soul. To bring out the increasing intensity of this life she shows how the higher powers are more and more positively captivated by God and the natural exercise of the lower faculties becomes suspended. However, she knows, as the text cited above shows, that the binding of the imagination is only an attendant and accidental phenomenon of the infused prayer of union and that ecstasy is not a sure sign of greater knowledge and love of God since it usually comes to an end in transforming union, the most perfect mystical state.³⁷

In connection with this subject Father Lallemand has something most apt to say in his *Spiritual Doctrine*:

It cannot be maintained that St. Teresa held that there were two ways, one mystical, one not mystical, for arriving at the Fifth Mansion. By stating that the prayer of supernatural recollection and the prayer of quiet are infused, she said just the opposite. Cf. also *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 18, 19, 20, 21.

³⁵ Fifth Mansion, chap. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 1.

³⁷ Seventh Mansion, chap. 3.

The degrees of contemplation, according to some, are, first, recollection of all the powers of the mind; secondly, semi-rapture; thirdly, complete rapture; fourthly, ecstasy. But this division expresses not so much the essence of contemplation as its accidents; for sometimes a soul without rapture will be favoured with a sublimer light, a clearer knowledge, a more excellent operation from God, than another who is favoured with the most extraordinary raptures and ecstasies. The Blessed Virgin was more elevated in contemplation than all the angels and saints united; and yet she had no raptures.³⁸

Like the girl Bernadette, some saints had raptures and ecstasies when they were children but afterward experienced them less often or not at all.

St. John of the Cross makes it quite clear that such phenomena are accidental. To bring out the increasing intensity of union with God, rather than the extension of the mystical state to the different faculties, he lays stress on the passive purifications required by this union. They provide a much better indication of the soul's progress in knowing and loving God because they belong to the very essence of the different stages of the spiritual life.

As we have seen, St. Teresa has not neglected these signs,³⁹ but neither has she elucidated them as well as St. John of the Cross. He, being a theologian, was more concerned than she with linking contemplation and union with God to their causes and thus explaining them. So he has shown us how contemplation is connected with an eminent degree of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost and how the progressive purification of the virtues brings souls to a

³⁸ Seventh Principle, chap. 6, art. 7.

³⁹ Sixth Mansion, chap. 1.

higher and simpler form of contemplation and to closer union with God. Thus he gives us an explanation of how virtue usually grows with prayer, since all the functions of the spiritual organism develop together.⁴⁰ The passive purification of the soul evidences this truth more strikingly than any other state because it requires heroic acts of faith, confidence, patience, and love of God and during it more than at any other time is verified the old maxim, *Ad lucem per crucem*. The cross frees men from illusions and leads anyone who carries it supernaturally to true contemplation and perfect love of God.

With a view to keeping souls from falling into discouragement, they should be advised at this time frequently to renew their consecration to Mary the Mediatrix and, with all the more reason, to the Sacred Heart. It should also be suggested that they consecrate themselves to the Holy Ghost, the Master of our interior life, so as to be henceforth more and more docile to Him in darkness as well as in light, in dryness as well as in joy. If we place our full consent in such a consecration, it will have marvelous consequences. If a formal pact with the devil, when fully consented to, can have such terrible results, we know that the will's full consent has no less import in the order of good than in the order of evil. Doubtless it is easier to destroy than to build; yet, with the help of grace, the building of the spiritual temple is always possible, and the Holy Ghost is infinitely more powerful than the demons. We have only to place ourselves under the direction of our inner Master and set ourselves never to refuse Him anything plainly in conformity with the duties of our state and of our vocation; then the more faithful we

⁴⁰ Ia IIac, q. 66, a. 2.

are, the more He will keep our chief obligations before our minds and so lead us, by a more and more generous practice of virtue, to perfect purification and union with God.

The value of the hidden life

Everything just said about the passive purification of the senses and the period normally following it, called the illuminative way, reveals the value of the hidden life to us. For a living and practical idea of it, we shall quote from a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles written by a priest friend long tried by illness, who obviously speaks from experience and desires to remain unknown. The great merit of this commentary is that it rises spontaneously and immediately from sensible symbols to spiritual realities and has passages of real beauty. The following pages relative to the first verses of the Canticle concern the apostolate of the hidden life.

O my God, when I meet a soul that You seem to have called to the true life, I feel impelled to pray boldly: Here is one of Your children, O Father! Give him a new mark of Your affection. You have already given him so much! If anything is lacking in his preparation, supply it so that he may be worthy of You! Purify him, adorn him, surround him with Your love. Take him up, as it were, in Your arms and hold him against Your great heart. And, I dare ask it, Father, reverently, humbly, but ardently as well, put Your kiss upon his mouth. I shall know no peace until You fulfill my desire. It is good; it is legitimate. I ask it for Your glory, for the good of this soul, and for my own sake, O Jesus. Remember the words of Your holy precursor: "He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice."

And grant that I may be able to say as he did: "This my joy is therefore fulfilled."

The conditions necessary to make an apostle of the interior life can evidently be reduced to two: an ardent desire to lead the hidden life and perfect docility to grace, so that the Holy Ghost may make whatever use He will of us as instruments for others. If we are to help souls by speaking to them of the interior life, the preparation necessary for it, its nature and its crown and consummation, we must have more than a scientific knowledge of these mysterious realities, such as can be had from a serious study of the masters. In this matter personal experience means much and rounds out common doctrine.

When a man is in immediate contact with the reality he is describing, his speech has an indescribable persuasiveness. He not only knows this reality but lives it and, in a sense, is it and, therefore, has no trouble putting it into words. Under the action of grace, his words become light and warmth and life to the listener. They have fire because the soul that expresses and is expressed by them is itself on fire and has, after striving long and patiently, been given this sometimes unmerited gift of utterance by God Himself. Then a man may give away the fruits of his garden, as St. Teresa puts it, without harm to himself. We must abide God's time, the autumn of the soul. If we attempt to reap in the spring instead of at harvest time, we are liable to let others go hungry and to starve to death ourselves. But when the time is really ripe, we must not let false humility or sham prudence make us refuse to give of our good things to others lest we smother our fire with ashes and allow the children of our heavenly Father to go hungry for bread.

Docility to grace is then most necessary for the apostle of the hidden life. Being only an instrument in the hands of the divine Worker, he must do nothing of himself and by himself. Ordinarily, of course, he remains free and autonomous. Only at certain

times and in certain events the Holy Ghost moves him without his taking the initiative of his own action. When this happens he has no other duty than to give his full and perfect consent to all his Master desires him to say or to do. In all other cases, he need only concern himself with cooperating disinterestedly, intelligently, and docilely with grace. God alone knows what He expects of a soul, what He desires to do with it, the plan of life He has sketched for it, the place He has set aside for it in His spiritual edifice, the part it has to play in time and in eternity. Nothing can prevail against the divine will.

The apostle of the hidden life who has fulfilled the two necessary conditions has a wonderful mission. God's mercy works but for one end: to teach us what heaven is, to make us desire it, to put in our hands the means to gain it. Now heaven is nothing else but perfect, conscious, and definitive participation in the inner life of God. And the interior life is nothing else but the imperfect but very real beginning of this participation: *inchoatio vitae aeternae, inchoatio et praelibatio beatitudinis*. Therefore, nothing on earth so resembles and so prepares us for eternal life as a life of intimacy with the adorable Trinity living at home in our hearts. And no more beautiful task exists in this world than to teach souls the art of beginning their heaven on earth. God is glorified, they are given happiness, and we are made glad.

O my Jesus, since You love interior souls so much, increase the number of those who worship the Father "in spirit and in truth." Let each one of them be more recollected, more earnest, more generous, and, in a word, more loving. Give to Your other selves, those to whom You have willed to confide the care of discovering, cultivating, and improving the souls so dear to You, an abundant share in Your priestly grace, that they may give themselves entirely to this divine task. Show them the beauty of these souls. See to it that they understand their full value. Illumine them with Your light. Surround them with Your love. Be their counselor and

guide in such an important and difficult undertaking. Make them prudent, patient, devoted, forgetful of self and concerned only with making You known and loved.⁴¹

⁴¹ Robert de Langeac, *Virgo Fidelis* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1931).

PART II

CROSSES OF THE SOUL

PURIFYING GRACES OF THE NIGHT OF THE SOUL

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL AS DESCRIBED BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

One of the most profound and original parts of the doctrine of St. John of the Cross, his richest contribution to the development of mystical theology and his greatest claim to the title of doctor, is that which deals with what he calls the passive night of the soul. By following what he says concerning it in the second book of *The Dark Night*, we wish first to show the necessity for such a purification, then to point out the principal features of his psychological description of it, and lastly to try to give a theological explanation of this grievous state by relating it to the supernatural cause which produces it and the end to which it is ordered.

There are several reasons why really interior souls will not find such a knowledge of his doctrine useless. They may not profit from a first superficial reading; but if they reread it more attentively, it will reveal to them the worth of the daily cross which we all must carry and teach them not to confuse our self-made troubles with those of real purifying value. It will make them see, too, the great differences between what beginners suffer in the night of the senses and what the advanced undergo in their preparation for the intimacy of divine union. And so they will come to understand how ridiculous it would be to believe ourselves in the second night

when we have hardly entered the first. A meditative reading discloses the distance separating us from the full perfection of Christian life. Only a few attain to it, and they have all passed through the crucible in one way or another. Spiritual pride does much to deceive us into believing that, without having traveled the long hard road, we are ready to reach the summit.

The Holy Ghost has deemed it wise to reveal these things to us in the great Book of Job and in some of the most beautiful verses of the psalms. They give us foreknowledge of the sufferings awaiting us in purgatory, if we fail to profit sufficiently from the crosses sent to us in this life. Finally, this sublime doctrine gives us a deeper understanding of the meaning of the seven last words of Christ on the cross, the best expression of the mystery of redemption and a subject for our daily meditation.

*The necessity for the passive purification
of the soul*

Those who go forward into the illuminative way must undergo the passive night of the soul so that the highest part of the soul, the intellect and the will, may be purified and rid of imperfections.¹ To enter into this way, they have already had to pass through the passive night of the senses for the purging of the lower, sensory part of the soul from the faults of beginners: spiritual greediness, laziness, jealousy, impatience, and spiritual pride. By plunging the soul into aridity, the passive night of the senses has achieved its purgation from sensuality especially, and the soul has begun to live the life of the spirit, receiving a general and obscure mode of con-

¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

templating what so attracts it, the infinite goodness of God.

Having passed through this night and left the state of beginners, the soul may spend a long time, even years, exercising itself in the way of proficients. Like someone liberated from rigorous imprisonment, it goes about the things of God with much greater freedom and satisfaction of soul and with more inward delight than it ever knew before.² This relatively calm period, usually occurring between the two purifications, the first of the senses and the second of the spirit, corresponds, as mentioned before, to the fourth and fifth mansions of St. Teresa. It includes the period of quiet, during which the will is caught by an attraction for God, and the period of simple union, during which God's action becomes strong enough at prayer to captivate not only the will but also the intellect, at times so completely that the operation of the memory and imagination is momentarily suspended. The imagination and other faculties are no longer bound, as before, by meditation and anxiety of mind, since the soul now finds within itself, without the labor of meditation, a sweet, serene, and loving contemplation.³ Yet the soul is far from being completely purified since its spiritual powers still want for purgation; and as long as this is so, some disorder will always arise in the lower part of the soul, not completely at peace until after the second night.

Those making progress in the illuminative way still have many imperfections, defects of the old man that remain in the soul like so much rust that only intense fire can remove. In fact, only too often the advanced are still distracted at

² *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. 1.

³ *Ibid.* These important texts are quoted again because they are needed to grasp the meaning of what follows.

prayer, given to foolishness and natural affections, and to pouring themselves out on external things. At times they are still rude and impatient. Some use spiritual goods with too little detachment and thus expose themselves to greater danger than they met at the start, since excessive attachment to spiritual communications lays them open to the devil, and he delights to take them in with vain visions and false prophecies, making them presume to trust their own imaginings as the voices of God and His saints.⁴ In this way he inflates their presumption, fills them with pride, and leads them to affect the manners of sanctity and to give a display of raptures and other visible signs of apparent holiness. People dedicated to the apostolate manifest the same weakness in a slightly different form. They can, for example, mistake a kind of romantic lyricism for the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and go far astray in teaching and in directing souls; or they can apply quite true principles incorrectly; or make false mystics of those whom they would lead to divine union.

In regard to some of the advanced, St. John of the Cross has something further to add: "In some of these souls so many falsehoods and deceits are multiplied and so persistent do they become, that it is very doubtful if such souls will return to the pure road of virtue and true spirituality." The holy doctor says that this subject is inexhaustible, despite the fact that he considers only faults relative to the interior life. What would it be then if we were also to consider faults that wound charity and even justice in the relations of these souls with others, whether superiors, equals, or inferiors; also, if we took up whatever taints teaching, the apostolate, and the government and direction of souls, if those referred to are engaged in such work?

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 2.

Spiritual pride takes many different forms: jealousy, secret ambition, intellectual pride, and an autocratic assertion of authority on one hand, and broad-minded and culpable indulgence on the other. For we meet the seven capital sins transposed into the spiritual life, where they work it grave harm.

All this evidences the necessity for the "strong lye" of the night of the soul. Without it the purity necessary for divine union will always be lacking.⁵

Therefore, since these proficients are still at a very low stage of progress, and follow their own nature closely in the intercourse and dealings which they have with God, because the gold of their spirit is not yet purified and refined, they still think of God as little children, and speak of God as little children, and feel and experience God as little children, even as St. Paul says, because they have not reached perfection, which is the union of the soul with God. In the state of union, however, they will work great things in the spirit, even as grown men, and their works and faculties will then be divine rather than human.⁶

In these words of St. John of the Cross we have a clear statement that the perfection of Christian life is normally of the mystical order, since it presupposes the purification of the senses and of the soul, both passive and distinctly defined mystical states.

Description of the night of the soul

As the night of the senses is marked by privation of sensible consolations, although it consists chiefly in the beginning of an unfelt and wholly spiritual life, the dawning of infused contemplation, so the night of the soul at first seems to mean

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 3.

the loss of what lights the soul had previously received. In reality, what is happening is that a much more intense light has begun to illumine and almost to dazzle the soul in regard to the depths of its own misery and the infinite greatness of God.

"He [God] strips their faculties, affections, and feelings, both spiritual and sensual, both outward and inward, leaving the understanding dark, the will dry, the memory empty, and the affections in the deepest affliction, bitterness and straitness, taking from the soul the pleasure and experience of spiritual blessings which it had aforesaid."⁷ This is the nakedness or poverty of spirit to which the beatitude refers when it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The understanding knows darkness, the will constraint, for it loves and seeks its Lord in anxiety, the memory is anguished because of its inability to recall what it once knew. The soul must go forward in blind faith, the darkness of night for the natural powers.⁸ Now we grasp the full meaning of St. Thomas' principle that the object of faith is hidden and unseen and can neither be immediately evident nor be proven to us, no matter how great our faith may be.⁹ With increasing experience of this truth, the soul leaves behind the base mode it had of understanding God, the miserable way it used to love Him, and the limited manner it once had of experiencing Him.¹⁰

It cannot be said that the soul discerns nothing in this dark night because, without seeing it, it is drawing nearer and nearer to the infinite greatness and purity of God, which no idea of ours could ever represent. Then by contrast the soul

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 4.

⁹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 5.

¹⁰ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 4.

perceives its own misery much better than ever before. This doctrine throws much light on the life of the Curé of Ars and the inner torments he experienced, since his greatest suffering came from the fact that he felt himself to be so far from the priestly ideal. In the obscurity of faith, he saw more and more clearly the greatness of the priestly character and the immense needs of the countless souls that came to him.¹¹ In such circumstances the soul's pain resembles what weak and unhealthy eyes suffer when looking at an intense light. "When this pure light assails the soul, in order to expel its impurity, the soul feels itself to be so impure and miserable that it believes God to be against it, and thinks that it has set itself up against God. This causes it so much grief and pain (because it now believes that God has cast it away) that one of the greatest trials which Job felt when God sent him this experience, was as follows, when he said: 'Why hast Thou set me against Thee, so that I am grievous and burdensome to myself?'"¹²

Seeing its own impurity, until now unsuspected, the soul is persuaded that it has lost all piety and is unfit for God or man. It cannot look forward to being any different or to possessing the good things it once knew and has now lost. In a flood of obscure divine light all its infidelities lie exposed before it, and it sees that by its own power it cannot act

¹¹ "In myself I see nothing but my sins," he said. "Yet God does not let me see all of them because I would be too tempted to despair. I have no other defense against this temptation than to throw myself down before the tabernacle, a dog at the feet of his master." At another time he said: "There are, of course, many good and upright priests; but to celebrate Mass a priest should be holy. Only in heaven will the full value of one Mass be known." He suffered much because of his sins and because of his inability to convert more sinners and bring them back to the way of salvation.

¹² *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

otherwise. It suffers to find in itself nothing but reasons why God should abandon it, while it yet loves Him with all its strength. It experiences that holy hatred of self spoken of by St. Catherine of Siena, having nothing but contempt for that self compounded of pride, egoism, and self-love. What St. Augustine had to say about the two cities begins to be realized: from the love of self unto contempt of God arises the city of evil, and from the love of God unto contempt of self, the city of God.¹³ Our Savior's words receive strong confirmation: "He that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal."¹⁴ The just man now really begins to love to be forgotten and to be despised by men: *amare nesciri et pro nihilo reputari*.

At times this imports such agony that the sufferer would regard it as a relief to be able to die, making us remember the words spoken by the prophet Elias when crushed by the difficulties of his apostolate: "It is enough for me, take away my soul: for I am no better than my fathers."¹⁵ The infinite perfection of God, without being seen, in some way makes itself felt and becomes like an enormous and invisible burden weighing down the soul. Dominated by this oppression, the soul sees itself as entirely unacquainted with divine favor and believes itself deprived of every support and bereft of all pity. The twenty-first psalm, remembered by Christ on the cross, gives deep expression to this experience: "O God my God, look upon me: why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my salvation are the words of my sins. O my God, I shall cry by day, and Thou wilt not hear: and by night, and it shall

¹³ *The City of God*, Bk. XIV, chap. 28.

¹⁴ John 12: 25.

¹⁵ III Kings 19: 4.

not be reputed as folly in me. But Thou dwellest in the holy place, the praise of Israel. In Thee have our fathers hoped: they have hoped, and Thou hast delivered them. They cried to Thee, and they were saved. . . . But I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. . . . From my mother's womb Thou art my God, depart not from me. For tribulation is very near: for there is none to help me."

Undergoing a similar trial, Job cried out: "Having pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."¹⁶ The soul feels itself languishing and dying by a cruel spiritual death and it must abide in the dark tomb until the coming of the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes.¹⁷ Until that day, it seems to the soul that it has lost every natural and supernatural good, that prayer itself has become impossible. A deep void cleaves down into the soul, its higher and lower powers are completely impoverished, and it feels the shadow of death over it, experiencing an inner destruction that goes to its very substance. Every remedy appears useless, every hope, lost. If it prays, it does so with such aridity that God seems no longer to hear it. "Yea, and when I cry," says Jeremias, "He hath shut out my prayer."¹⁸

The whole description of the night of the soul can be summed up in the statement that the soul now knows what it never before suspected, the depths of its own misery, and by contrast it has a growing realization of God's infinite greatness, apparently inaccessible for such as itself. Three complementary signs complete the description: they will be

¹⁶ Job 19: 21.

¹⁷ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 6.

¹⁸ Lam. 3: 8.

discussed later. For the present it is enough to say that purgation of soul is usually accompanied by strong temptations against faith—its object seems so distant; against hope—God's help no longer makes itself felt; against charity—the Lord has apparently cruelly deserted the tried man at the very time when his friends have forsaken him or remained at his side only to prove Job's comforters. In comparison to sufferings such as these, the trials of the night of the senses and its concomitant temptations against chastity and patience are of small moment.

On the degree to which the soul will later be raised depends the length and severity of its purgation. However, if such a refining process is to achieve its final end, its severest phase will last for some years.¹⁹ The soul works its way forward through a tunnel of darkness, catching occasional glimpses of daylight. Ordinarily the more intense a purgation is, the shorter it lasts.²⁰ The description of it given by St. John of the Cross presents it as it takes place in all its intensity and fullness in the saints, as he himself had to undergo it. Often, however, it is found in lower degrees and in less contemplative forms, united to the trials encountered in the apostolate.

St. Gregory spoke of this state in his commentaries on the Book of Job;²¹ after him, Hugh of St. Victor²² and Tauler gave descriptions of it which, though lacking the compass and depth of that given by St. John of the Cross, provided the framework for it.²³ St. Teresa treats of it somewhat at

¹⁹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 8.

²¹ *Morales*, XXIV, chap. 6, no. 11; X, chap. 10, no. 17.

²² *In Eccl.*, hom. 1.

²³ Cf. Tauler, those passages where he speaks of faith denuded of all consolation, naked faith, especially the first sermon for the feast of the Blessed Trinity.

His disciples have made a summary of this doctrine in the *Institutions*, chap. 12:

length at the beginning of the sixth mansion before taking up the subject of spiritual betrothal, showing at what period she thought this purification generally appears.²⁴ St. Angela of Foligno, too, has left us a description entirely in accordance with the one given in *The Dark Night*.²⁵ Lastly, in almost all lives of the saints that make an attempt to unveil the mystery of their inner life, we find similar descriptions in those chapters dealing with their interior suffering and heroic practice of the theological virtues. Again and again we encounter different degrees of what at bottom is always the same purgation of soul, not merely in pure contemplatives, but in active souls like St. Vincent de Paul, too, as we realize when we recall the temptations which he had against faith for almost four years. So terrible were they that he wrote the Credo on a piece of paper and wore it over his heart so that

"Very spiritual people who have arrived at the highest degree of contemplation sometimes feel themselves so overwhelmed by their own inner poverty that they would be willing to suffer any kind of death, no matter how hard or violent, if God so willed, that they might thereby be delivered from their indigence. No spiritual consolation relieves them, and their interior affliction penetrates to the very marrow of their bones . . . making them wither away with grief. . . . They can find no consolation in creatures. . . . God treats His elect in this way . . . often leaving them in such utter want and terrible interior dryness, that they believe themselves to be entirely deprived of grace, of faith, of charity, and of every kind of good."

²⁴ Sixth Mansion, chap. 1: "One of the severe trials of these souls . . . is their belief that God permits them to be deceived in punishment for their sins. . . . Especially is this the case when such spiritual dryness ensues that the mind feels as if it never had thought of God nor ever will be able to do so. When men speak of Him, they seem to be talking of some person heard of long ago."

²⁵ "I see myself destitute of everything good, empty of every virtue and grace, and full of many vices and vanities. Hope has left me and mercy has hidden herself. I behold myself as the abode of Satan, his tool, his dupe, his daughter, without uprightness or truth, worthy of the lowest depths of hell fire. . . . In soul and body I see nothing but defects: God is shut away and hidden from me; to remember Him serves only to confound me. . . . There are no doors or windows through which to escape. . . . In the deep abyss into which I have fallen I find no remedy for all these evils." *Le Livre de la Bse Angèle*, p. 82; also *Boll. Acta sanct.*, January 4, nos. 39 and 40.

he could put his hand over it and reassure himself that he had not consented to the thoughts that obsessed him. It was by passing through the crucible of this suffering that he was purified and attained to sanctity.

*The theological explanation of
passive purification: its causes and end*

In describing this state, we have just determined where it is found—chiefly in the highest part of the soul, the spiritual powers, and what its essential character is—the deep experimental knowledge of our misery and of God's infinite majesty, together with great spiritual aridity and an earnest desire for perfection. These constitute what can be called the material and formal causes of this state. The proximate efficient cause, as well as the principle and end of this grievous and obscure contemplation remain to be considered.

The causal explanation of the state of purgation given by St. John of the Cross is theological, given in the light of revelation as contained in Scripture and tradition. Theology teaches us that faith is a supernatural gift of God, that the Holy Ghost is within us together with His sevenfold gifts, and from theology we learn also how faith and the gifts attain their full growth. The author of *The Dark Night* finds the principle for his explanation in scriptural texts. After noting the chief ones given, we shall go on to discover in what sense he understands them and how his thought conforms completely to what St. Thomas tells us of the purifying role of the gift of understanding.

In the Book of Wisdom it is said of the just: "As gold in the furnace He hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust

He hath received them."²⁶ In the crucible gold is purified of all dross, and holocaustal offerings are entirely consumed by fire for God's honor. The soul of a saint is a sort of spiritual diamond offering no obstacle to divine light, and it takes no ordinary flame to make diamonds out of coal. In his Lamentations, Jeremias says: "From above He hath sent fire into my bones, and hath chastised me."²⁷ In the light of the fire consuming him the prophet sees clearly both the gravity of Israel's sins and the justice and goodness of the Most High, and he begs God earnestly for deliverance.

Like gold, the soul is purified by fire; but as the soul must realize its misery and desire to be freed of its dross, the fire purifying it must make God's infinite riches and its own radically opponent poverty more evident to it in the obscurity of faith. Growth in this knowledge leads to such an ardent love of God that the soul has nothing but contempt for itself. "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord."²⁸ "My substance is as nothing before Thee."²⁹ "The Lord . . . will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."³⁰ "Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death."³¹ "O my God, enlighten my darkness."³² "Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation: and strengthen me

²⁶ Wisd. 3: 6.

²⁷ Lam. 1: 13.

²⁸ Ps. 18: 13.

²⁹ Ps. 38: 6.

³⁰ I Cor. 4: 5.

³¹ Ps. 12: 4.

³² Ps. 17: 29.

with a perfect spirit.”³³ The soul asks Christ to realize within it His own words, “I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?”³⁴ Christ answers inwardly by His grace just as if He were saying: “You would not seek Me, if you had not already found Me.” The ardent love growing in a purified soul is a fire burning and consuming all that cannot be quickened by divine charity. Often we long for souls to receive light and strength, and in this way our desires for them are wonderfully fulfilled.

St. John of the Cross explains these texts of Scripture just quoted by saying simply: “This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual, and which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation, or mystical theology. Herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in perfection of love, without its doing anything, or understanding of what manner is this infused contemplation.”³⁵

Repeating the comparison made by Hugh of St. Victor,³⁶ the holy doctor adds:

For the greater clearness of what has been said, and of what has still to be said, it is well to observe at this point that this purgative and loving knowledge or divine light whereof we here speak acts upon the soul which is purged and prepared for perfect union with it in the same way as fire acts upon a log of wood in order to transform it into itself; for material fire, acting upon wood, first of all begins to dry it, by driving out its moisture and causing it to shed the water which it contains within itself. Then it begins to make it black, dark, and unsightly, and even to give forth a bad

³³ Ps. 50: 12.

³⁴ Luke 12: 49.

³⁵ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

³⁶ *In Eccl.*, hom. 1.

odour, and, as it dries it little by little, it brings out and drives away all the dark and unsightly accidents which are contrary to the nature of fire. And, finally, it begins to kindle it externally and give it heat, and at last transforms it into itself and makes it as beautiful as fire. . . .

In this same way we have to philosophize with respect to this divine fire of contemplative love, which, before it unites and transforms the soul in itself, first purges it of all its contrary accidents. It drives out its unsightliness, and makes it black and dark, so that it seems worse than before and more unsightly and abominable than it was wont to be. For this divine purgation is removing all the evil and vicious humours which the soul has never perceived because they have been so deeply rooted and grounded in it; it has never realized, in fact, that it has had so much evil within itself. But now that they are to be driven forth and annihilated, these humours reveal themselves, and become visible to the soul . . . and, as it sees in itself that which it saw not before, it is clear to it that it is not only unfit for God to see it, but that it deserves His abhorrence and that He does indeed abhor it.³⁷

This means a purgatory before death, purifying the soul not by material fire but through the spiritual fire of contemplation and of love. St. John of the Cross says that an hour of purgation here being worth many hereafter, a soul so treated in this world either has no need to make expiation in the next life or stays in purgatory only a short time.³⁸ While on earth we are purified while meriting and growing in charity, whereas after death we are purified without meriting, the time of merit being past.

The supernatural light coming from God to the soul at this time is not merely the light of infused faith, although

³⁷ *Op. cit.* Bk. II, chap. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

this surely is deeply at work because the soul lives more and more in the spirit of faith; but the Holy Ghost exercises a further and special influence over it through the gift of understanding, perfectly in harmony with faith. As St. John of the Cross says, the soul, being now united to divine love, no longer loves according to its own lowly nature but with the strength and purity of the Holy Ghost,³⁹ receiving a new way of looking at things since the light and grace of the Holy Ghost is as different from natural knowledge as the divine is from the human. "For this night is gradually drawing the spirit away from its ordinary and common experience of things and bringing it nearer the divine sense, which is a stranger and an alien to all human ways. It seems now to the soul that it is going forth from its very self, with much affliction."⁴⁰

The doctrine of St. John of the Cross seems to be fully in accord with what St. Thomas teaches concerning the gift of understanding as principle of a new penetration and purification. "The stronger the light of the understanding, the further can it penetrate into the heart of things. Now the natural light of our understanding is of finite power; wherefore it can reach to a certain fixed point. Consequently man needs a supernatural light in order to penetrate further still so as to know what it cannot know by its natural light: and this supernatural light which is bestowed on man is called the gift of understanding."⁴¹ What God bestows is called the gift of understanding and not of reason, because what is designated is something higher than reasoning, a kind of

knowledge as simple and penetrating as a shaft of light.⁴²

Whereas faith makes us simply hold to revealed truths, this gift helps us to perceive them in some way, keeping us from taking them for inventions of men or doubting them because of objections from unbelievers.⁴³ It perfects our first grasp of the truths of faith and disposes us the better to judge them and experience them by the gift of wisdom.⁴⁴ It dissipates dullness of mind; our Lord was thinking of it when He said: *Qui potest capere, capiat*. Happy are those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, who grasp the spirit beneath the letter, who take hold of the divine reality hidden under figure, symbol, and parable. The gift of understanding is at once contemplative and practical, since it considers eternal truths both in themselves and so far as they are the supreme law of human conduct.⁴⁵ It shows us what is blameworthy in ourselves much better than the most careful examination of conscience and reveals the value of our last end with the clarity of a lightning flash.⁴⁶

Further, as St. Thomas tells us, the gift of understanding frees our mind of speculative and practical errors and from attachment to sensible imagery.⁴⁷ Moreover, together with faith, it serves as the principle of a high degree of contemplation. "The sight of God is twofold. One is perfect, whereby God's essence is seen: the other is imperfect, whereby, though we see not what God is, yet we see what He is not; and whereby, the more perfectly do we know God in this life,

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, a. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, a. 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, a. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, a. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 9.

⁴¹ *IIa IIae*, q. 8, a. 1.

the more we understand that He surpasses all that the mind comprehends. Each of these visions of God belongs to the gift of understanding; the first, to the gift of understanding in the state of perfection, as possessed in heaven; the second, to the gift of understanding in its state of inchoation, as possessed by wayfarers."⁴⁸ In the same article St. Thomas explains how the gift of understanding purifies our hearts and corresponds to the beatitude, "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." By it we apprehend more and more clearly that the most highly endowed creature is nothing of itself and that God alone is eternally subsistent being, in whom essence and existence are one and the same. "I am who am."⁴⁹

St. Thomas has much the same to say elsewhere when showing that uniform infused contemplation in some way demands the sacrifice of the senses and of discursive reasoning:

In intelligible operations, that which is simply uniform is compared to circular movement. . . . Wherefore Dionysius assigns the circular movement of the angels to the fact that their intuition of God is uniform and unceasing. . . . But on the part of the soul, ere it can arrive at this uniformity, its twofold lack of uniformity needs to be removed. First, that which arises from the variety of external things: this is removed by the soul withdrawing from externals, and so the first thing he mentions regarding the circular movement of the soul is the soul's withdrawal into itself from external objects. Secondly, another lack of uniformity requires to be removed from the soul, and this is owing to the discoursing of reason. This is done by directing all the soul's operations to the simple contemplation of intelligible truth, and this

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, a. 7.

⁴⁹ Exod. 3: 14.

is indicated by his saying in the second place that the soul's intellectual powers must be uniformly concentrated; in other words, that discoursing must be laid aside and the soul's gaze fixed on the contemplation of the one simple truth. . . . Afterwards these two things being done, he mentions thirdly the uniformity which is like that of the angels, for then all things being laid aside, the soul continues in the contemplation of God alone.⁵⁰

This turning of the intellectual powers around their center, closes them, so to say, like the spirals of a conch, so that external things are shut out and they are left open only to a simple and obscure but more and more penetrating intuition of God.

This penetration comes, we see, from the gift of understanding. Its infused and purifying light makes known to us the most hidden recesses of our conscience, the secret intentions of our heart, and, on the other hand, it enables us to go beyond the letter of God's word to reach its spirit, and it makes us see, as we could not see before, that, just as the firmament is far vaster than the stars that map it out for us, so is God above any distinct idea whatever that we can have of Him, even though it is given to us by revelation. The light of the gift of understanding discovers to us that the Deity or inner life of God (what makes God to be God) is above every perfection that is common in an analogous way to Him and to us, that the Deity is greater than being, unity, truth, goodness, intellect, and love.

To grasp the intimate reconciliation of divine immutability and the freedom of the creative act, of inexorable justice and infinite mercy, of sovereign wisdom and of that good pleasure which seems at times arbitrary, we would need to have

⁵⁰ *IIa IIae*, q. 180, a. 6.

an immediate apprehension of the Deity itself.⁵¹ All these perfections exist formally and eminently in God and, far from being destroyed by being united in the eminence of the Godhead, they are found there in a pure state, with no trace of imperfection.⁵² Whereas the seven colors of the rainbow exist only virtually in white light, the divine perfections exist formally in the eminence of the Deity but according to a transcendent mode inaccessible to us. *Deitas est super ens et super unum*, as Dionysius says, and Cajetan joyfully repeats.⁵³ The highest theological speculation accords then with what the mystics tell us of the great darkness that envelops the soul. "What my soul sees," Angela of Foligno says, "cannot be conceived by thought or expressed in words. I see nothing and I see all; the more the infinite good is beheld in darkness, the more certain it becomes to us and the more it surpasses all things. . . . All the graces that have been accorded to me amount to very little in comparison to the infinite good that I see in the divine darkness."⁵⁴

*The reason for the darkness and suffering
resulting from the infused light of understanding*

There are three reasons why the light God sends us seems like darkness and brings so much suffering. They are: the sublimity of God's mysteries, our own impurity, and the

⁵¹ Certainly God need not have created. He is not greater for having brought the universe into existence; nevertheless, although His creative act is sovereignly free, it is not contingent and accidental and capable of non-existence. In God all that He is identified with His absolutely necessary and immutable essence. For us to be able to reconcile His immutability with the freedom of His creative act we would have to see the divine essence such as it is in itself, *sicuti est*.

⁵² *God, His Existence and His Nature*, II, 187 ff.

⁵³ Cf. Cajetan, *In Iam*, q. 39, a. 1, no. 7.

⁵⁴ Arnaud, *Boll. Acta sanct.*, January 4, c. 4, nos. 72-76.

temptations of the devil. In regard to the first, it comes about precisely because the Deity or inner life of God is infinitely above every sensible image, whether actual or potential. To see the Godhead as It is in Itself, *sicuti est*, It would have to be presented to us without any intermediary.⁵⁵ And the more we understand the incapacity of all created ideas, whether of men or of angels, to reveal the uncreated and infinite light to us, the more inaccessible this light seems to us. It has, not the infra-intellectual mysteriousness of matter, but the ultra-luminous darkness of supreme truth, of truth too intelligible for us to grasp. Sunlight is darkness for the owl. Its eyes are not strong enough to bear such brightness. Comparably, the intellectual and eternally subsistent brilliance of God is darkness to any created intelligence, whether angelic or human, as long as it is not uplifted and strengthened by the light of glory, as are the elect in the homeland of heaven.

In order to prove the first point, we must here assume a certain doctrine of the philosopher, which says that, the clearer and more manifest are divine things in themselves, the darker and more hidden are they to the soul naturally; just as, the clearer is the light, the more it blinds and darkens the pupil of the owl, and, the more directly we look at the sun, the greater is the darkness which it causes in our visual faculty, overcoming and overwhelming it through its own weakness. In the same way, when this divine light of contemplation assails the soul which is not yet wholly enlightened, it causes spiritual darkness in it . . . not that this is so in fact, but that it is so to our weak understanding, which is blinded and darkened by so vast a light, to which it cannot attain.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. Ia. q. 12, a. 2.

⁵⁶ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

Now this is a thing that seems incredible, to say that, the brighter and purer is supernatural and divine light, the more it darkens the soul, and that, the less bright and pure is it, the less dark it is to the soul. Yet this may well be understood if we consider what has been proved above by the dictum of the philosopher—namely, that the brighter and the more manifest in themselves are supernatural things the darker are they to the understanding.⁵⁷

Our natural knowledge comes, in fact, from sensible things, a mirror through which from below and very imperfectly it reaches purely spiritual realities. For us the statement that “the sun exists” is clearer than that “God is,” notwithstanding the fact that God alone is eternally subsistent being itself. Time seems clearer to us than eternity, in spite of the fact that a fleeting moment is in itself less intelligible than the *nunc stans*, the changeless now, of eternity, in which God possesses all at once, *tota simul*, His whole life without beginning or end. The decrees of Providence that we find hardest to understand are the most enlightened in themselves. The Savior’s passion, the worst time of darkness and discouragement for the apostles, was Christ’s greatest victory over sin and Satan, far greater than His triumph over death by the glorious miracle of the resurrection, itself only a sign of confirmation for the *Consummatum est* of Good Friday.

The more hidden a revealed mystery is, the more devotion St. Teresa had for it. Her intense charity made her prefer to love and delight in all that is most obscure and mysterious in the faith, whatever transcends all rational evidence and every express formula. So, too, the most brilliant passages in the doctrine of St. Paul, of St. Augustine, and of St. Thomas on the transcendent efficacy of the divine causality working in

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 8.

us both to will and to accomplish⁵⁸ will always be enveloped in mystery in this life. A divine obscurity at the opposite pole from incoherence and absurdity enshrouds them. The higher, simpler, and more unalterable supernatural things are, the more obscure they seem to us, since our knowledge is generally drawn from sensible, multiple, composite, and changing things. Now the infused light of understanding belongs to the same order as the supernatural objects which it makes us able to penetrate; like them it seems dark, although we receive from it the spirit of the divine word and enter by it into the supreme simplicity of God.

St. John of the Cross tells us that the divine ray of contemplation transcends the soul’s natural powers and thus

darkens and deprives it of all natural affections and apprehensions which it apprehended aforetime by means of natural light; and thus it leaves it not only dark, but likewise empty, according to its faculties and desires, both spiritual and natural. And by thus leaving it empty and in darkness, it purges and illumines it with divine spiritual light even when the soul thinks not that it has this light, but believes itself to be in darkness, even as we have said of the ray of light, which, although it be in the midst of the room, yet, if it be pure and meet nothing on its path, is not visible. With regard, however, to this spiritual light by which the soul is assailed, when it has something to strike—that is, when something spiritual presents itself to be understood, however small a speck it be and whether of perfection or imperfection, or whether it be a judgment of the falsehood or the truth of a thing—it then sees and understands much more clearly than before it was in these dark places.⁵⁹

St. Thomas makes an analogous observation concerning the

⁵⁸ Phil. 2: 13.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 8.

inspiration or illumination coming to us from the angels.⁶⁰

A second reason why the divine light seems obscure and sometimes causes much suffering, is the impurity of our own souls. As St. Augustine tells us, the same light that healthy eyes enjoy cannot be borne by those that are unsound. "And when the soul is assailed by this divine light, its pain, which results from its impurity, is immense; because, when this pure light assails the soul, in order to expel its impurity, the soul feels itself to be so impure and miserable that it believes God to be against it, and thinks it has set itself up against God."⁶¹ There are some truths that we do not wish to hear and will not let others tell us. If God efficaciously wills to lead us to perfection, He Himself will come to make us listen to them, even if this causes us terrible suffering.

A third and further cause for suffering springs from temptations arising against faith, hope, and charity. Although making heroic acts of these virtues, acts simple, direct, and often unperceived, the soul wonders whether it may not have consented to temptation; it becomes so bewildered in its reasoning that it begins to think itself abandoned by God and is unable to feel that it can ever reach Him.⁶² The more it loves Him, the more it suffers, knowing the same sort of ebb and flow that the souls in purgatory must bear, for it is carried toward God with the full uprush of its love and then feels

⁶⁰ He remarks that men are not often conscious of having been enlightened by angels. Ia. q. 111, a. 1, ad 3um: "Intellectual operation and enlightenment can be understood in two ways: First, on the part of the object understood; thus whoever understands or is enlightened, knows that he understands or is enlightened, because he knows that the object is made known to him. Secondly, on the part of the principle; and thus it does not follow that whoever understands a truth, knows what the intellect is, which is the principle of the intellectual operation. In like manner, not everyone who is enlightened by an angel, knows that he is enlightened by him."

⁶¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

⁶² Cf. *Vie du Père Surin*, Baux (Paris, 1876).

itself turned back by its well-known wretchedness, fearing much to offend Him whom it would love above all things.

As a result of such a purgation the three theological virtues show marked growth, having been frequently constrained to make heroic acts to overcome temptation and thus taking deep root in the soul and becoming purified of every defect. The gifts accompanying these great virtues also increase proportionately with them. St. John of the Cross gives an excellent description of the state of deliverance of the purified soul when he says: "It has pleasure in nothing and understands nothing in particular, but dwells in emptiness, darkness, and obscurity"; yet, as he goes on to say, "it embraces everything with great adaptability, to the end that those words of St. Paul may be fulfilled in it: having nothing, and possessing all things. For such poverty of spirit as this would deserve such happiness."⁶³

The fire of love, . . . like material fire acting upon wood, begins to take hold upon the soul in this night of painful contemplation. . . . This is an enkindling of love in the spirit, where, in the midst of these dark afflictions, the soul feels itself to be keenly and acutely wounded in strong divine love. . . .

And inasmuch as this love is infused, it is passive rather than active, and thus it begets in the soul a strong passion of love . . . and may thus attain to a true fulfillment of the first commandment, which sets aside nothing pertaining to man nor excludes from this love anything that is his, but says: Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul and with all thy strength.⁶⁴

For a completely faithful soul the living flame of love is the normal development of charity in this life. In darkness

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

and suffering, "in this vale of tears," it is the prelude of eternal life.⁶⁵ We can understand then how a soul purified in such a meritorious way, passes immediately from earth to heaven without remaining in purgatory, where merit is no longer possible.⁶⁶ Such is the perfect order willed by God. The just who are even more docile in time of trial than in time of consolation and never give up pushing on toward God are ready for the rendezvous fixed by Him for the moment after death. They enter at once into their heavenly home and receive their reward, the very happiness of God; and they find the highest aspirations of our nature fulfilled and exceeded, and also the burning supernatural desires aroused during the night of the soul fully satisfied: "But as for me, I will appear before Thy sight in justice: I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 3, ad 2um; Ia IIae, q. 69, a. 2; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2.

⁶⁶ Cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 6, at the end. Only through their own fault, by neglecting precious graces, do souls go to purgatory after death; if they had been faithful they would have been purified while meriting in this life according to the order established by divine Providence for completely generous souls.

⁶⁷ In a recent work, *Unidad específica de la contemplación cristiana* (a *Ciencia Tomista* abstract, 1926), pp. 15-20, Father Ign. G. Menendez-Reigada, O.P., shows that Christian contemplation is essentially supernatural and infused and, because of that, far superior to acquired contemplation, whether of a philosophical or theological kind. He makes it quite plain that the soul must therefore undergo a passive purification. He says that apparent evidences for supernatural truths resulting either from the sensible symbols used to express them or from well ordered lines of reasoning employed to interpret them remain in the insufficiently supernaturalized mind as a sort of sediment or dregs. Such evidence is only subjective, for the mysteries of faith are obscure and invident. During the passive purification of the soul, the gift of understanding makes us discern this truth more and more clearly, showing us how the object of pure faith is above the light of sensible symbols and human reasoning. It seems to souls purified in this way that they lack faith; but they have lost nothing but its natural bases, certain natural evidences with which their supernatural act of faith has been alloyed. Thus faith is purified of every alloy, of every natural sediment, and it cleaves more and more to the mysteries of faith in their essentially supernatural character, for the wholly pure, entirely supernatural, supra-rational formal motive of divine revelation whereby, with one and the same act, we believe in God revealing and in what He reveals, *Credimus Deo et credimus Deum, uno et eodem actu (essentialiter supernaturali)*. Cf. IIa IIae, q. 2, a. 2, c. et ad rum.

CHAPTER VII

THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF FAITH

Trials accompanying the passive purification of the soul

The period of trial which St. John of the Cross calls the night of the soul is necessary, not only to free souls from those things that still prevent them from enjoying the intimacy of divine union—the remains of unconscious egoism, self-love, and intellectual and spiritual pride—but also to give great strength to the higher virtues. Because of the temptations against chastity and patience often accompanying initial infused contemplation, the night of the senses is a period of holy warfare, during which the virtues having their basis in the sensuous appetency show great gain. For the same reasons, the night of the soul is marked by still greater progress in the highest virtues, in humility, the virtue of religion, and the three theological virtues.

The means used by God to purify us in this way is, as St. Thomas¹ and St. John of the Cross² have shown, the supernatural light of the gift of understanding. It illumines the soul about the infinite greatness of God, for we recognize more and more clearly how far He is above every idea and formula that we can frame of His greatness. By contrast, the

¹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 8, a. 8.

² *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. 5, 8, 9, 11.

soul discovers that it has miseries heretofore unsuspected. The light that God gives it is sometimes so intense that the eyes of the mind, as yet still weak, become dazzled and as if blinded by it and, although the soul is moving forward into greater clarity, it believes itself swallowed up in darkness.

God purifies humility and the theological virtues chiefly by means of this light, but He also makes use of the enemy of salvation himself for this work, sometimes permitting the devil to try souls with violent temptations against faith, hope, and charity. Those tried in this way find that they must make intense and meritorious acts of virtue, and so temptation contributes to their growth. The soul is the arena for a struggle between Satan and the Holy Ghost, a struggle that at times becomes terrible, the devil evidently desiring to attack God's work with weapons like His own. The more the Lord attracts a soul toward the heights of faith, the more the devil strives to deny that they exist. The soul finds itself between two kinds of sufferings: one comes from God and is essentially purifying; the other comes from the spirit of evil, and God makes it serve His own ends indirectly.

Something marvelous now happens, something reminiscent of the first conversion or justification of the impious, when the soul passes from the state of mortal sin into the state of grace. As St. Thomas taught³ and the Council of Trent later defined, the soul at the time of its first conversion is led by God to realize its own misery and to make an act of faith in the infinite merits of the Savior, to hope in God, to love Him above all things, and to hate sin as the greatest of evils. By justifying us, the good God has, as it were, plowed a furrow in the soul for the sowing of the divine seed there; now, in

³ Ia IIae, q. 113, a. 4, 5, 7, 8.

the passive night of the soul, He goes back over the same furrow again to extirpate all the evil roots still to be found there. This He does that the seed of eternal life, the *semen gloriae*, can give its full yield of thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold, according to the parable of the sower.⁴

By the light of the gift of understanding the Lord shows the soul not what He is in His infinite holiness, but what He is not; by opposition, it sees its own nothingness, weakness, and baseness, and, under the influx of the grace that it receives, makes profound acts of humility, of faith, of hope, and of charity, acts necessary and indispensable if it is to resist the temptations arising against these virtues.

To get a better understanding of how this great purification is effected, let us compare what St. John of the Cross tells us of the infused light given in the night of the soul with what St. Thomas teaches about the formal motive of the highest supernatural virtues. Clearly, the more perfectly these virtues attain by their acts to the primary object and formal motive specifying them, the more purified they are of every natural alloy.

Acts and habits are specified by their formal object.⁵ We are going to see the manner of purification described by St. John of the Cross. It often occurs in a less rigorous way, mixed with the sufferings of the apostolate; but even this mitigated form is properly understood only if we discern in it the other higher mode that represents the perfect development of the supernatural seed within us. It must be noted, too, that not merely in the lives of individuals do these purgations take place but in the lives of groups of people, of

⁴ Matt. 13: 23.

⁵ Cf. *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. 54, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 7, a. 4, ad 3um; Ia, q. 78, a. 1.

religious families as well, especially at the time either of their foundation or of their full development, when trial is made to discover whether the house is built on rock or on sand. And the Lord waits, as it were, until these trials are done so that He may give crowns to those who are faithful to Him, whether they are individuals or whole peoples.

Humility and piety on trial

The good God teaches humility to the saints by showing them the abyss still separating them from Him. We can learn to practice the same virtue by looking at the distance dividing us from the saints. They show us how, in a truly Christian spirit, we ought to bear our crosses, so much less heavy than theirs.

St. Augustine says that humility is the foundation of the spiritual structure. For the building to be sound its foundation must go deep into the earth. Its cornerstone, St. Thomas says, is faith; the excavation necessary before the first stone can be laid is humility, which drives out spiritual pride so that we can receive the word of God with docility. As these things have been said to us again and again from the first days of our interior life, we have broken ground, done some excavating, and then begun to build our spiritual structure. But days stormy with temptations of pride and of revolt have made us realize that our building lacked sturdiness and might have been blown down, had the storm been worse.

We should have made our foundation deeper. When the Lord desires to raise the spiritual edifice of a soul to great heights, He Himself takes charge of digging down into depths which we are unaware of. Saints whom He has so grounded, no matter to what heights He may later lead

them, find pride impossible because they have had sufficient experience of their own nothingness and wretchedness, less than mere nothingness. We too often forget that the interior sufferings of the Curé of Ars came from his growing enlightenment regarding the greatness of the priesthood and his consequent conclusion that he himself fell far short of being fit for it.

Intense supernatural light gives the soul a lofty idea of perfection and shows it its own powerlessness and poverty incomparably better than the most careful examination of conscience. We then come to know experimentally the profound meaning of Christ's words, "Without Me you can do nothing."⁶ "No one can come to Me, except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him."⁷ We discern much better than ever before what St. Paul meant when he wrote: "For who distinguisheth thee? Or what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"⁸ Experience teaches the soul how truly the Church has spoken in teaching, against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, that grace is necessary, not merely to accomplish supernatural acts better, but to accomplish them at all. It understands more truly how grace, as St. Augustine and St. Thomas say, is efficacious of itself and not because of our efforts, according to St. Paul's deep pronouncement: "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will."⁹

In the light of the gift of understanding, the soul discerns everything that taints its best deeds. Just as when a ray of

⁶ John 15: 5.

⁷ John 6: 44.

⁸ I Cor. 4: 7.

⁹ Phil. 2: 13.

sunlight passes through apparently limpid water we detect a host of tiny particles imperceptible in diffused light, so now the soul sees such a multitude of faults within itself that it is completely humiliated and overwhelmed. The devil often takes this opportunity to tempt it to discouragement, and if the Lord were to withhold His special help, it would yield to the temptation.

St. Anselm marks out the way to true humility as having seven degrees: first a man knows that he is worthy of contempt; then he learns to endure being contemptible; goes on to own that he is so; and then to wish His neighbor to believe it of him; comes to put up with being told that he is; and after that to accept being treated with contempt; and finally to love to be so used.¹⁰ The humble man no longer glories in himself, but in God alone, and lives in the profound conviction that whatever we have of ourselves—our worthlessness and our sins—is inferior to whatever another man holds from God.¹¹ All the saints have had a realization of our nothingness. Full Christian perfection is impossible without it, for it sets the soul definitively in the way of truth and gives to God the glory due Him.

When Blessed Angela of Foligno was enduring the passive purification of which we are speaking, she saw herself as an abyss of sin and wished to make it known to everybody and make an end of what she called her hypocrisy. St. Benedict Joseph Labre began his confession by saying, "Have pity on me, Father. I am a great sinner." The confessor, not finding anything grave in what he accused himself of, thought that he did not know how to make his confession and questioned

him on the commandments of God, receiving answers so humble and so penetrated with the spirit of faith, that he knew he was dealing with a saint.

Together with humility, the virtue of religion grows mightily during such trials. In those who remain faithful, substantial devotion (which is nothing else but readiness of will in God's service) shows fuller and fuller development in the absence of all accidental devotion, since the soul perseveres in prayer without experiencing either sensible or spiritual consolation. The gift of piety lends strong support to the virtue of religion, and prayer is infused but very arid. St. Jane Frances de Chantal spent long years in this state.

Going into the matter more deeply, we find that the special end of this purgation is to rid the theological virtues of all defects. By the light of St. Thomas' doctrine, we see now more than at any other time that the purification of the great virtues is accomplished by freeing their absolutely supernatural motive from all human ends, now recognized as being infinitely below it. Despite all obstacles and notwithstanding its own foresakenness, the soul is led to cleave to God solely because He is first truth, infinite mercy, supreme and sovereignly lovable goodness.

As already remarked, nominalist theologians and those who follow them, have frequently failed to appreciate the essentially supernatural character, the *quoad substantiam*, of the formal motive of these virtues. The supernaturalness of a miracle belongs to a far lower order since it is naturally knowable, whereas the formal motive of the theological virtues lies beyond the reach of any natural knowledge.¹² What we are

¹⁰ *Ila Ilac*, q. 161, a. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, a. 3.

¹² The miracle of the resurrection gives back to the body in a supernatural way its natural life, vegetative and sentient, belonging to an order infinitely less than

going to consider next will show us the magnitude of the mistake made by those with nominalistic leanings.

*Imperfections that stand in the way
of a life of deep faith*

Faith is an infused, essentially supernatural virtue by which we believe the mysteries revealed by God because He has revealed them and as they are proposed to us by the Church, the proximate guide of our belief. Through the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Ghost¹³ our intellect, moved by the will, adheres to an essentially supernatural revelation and to the hidden mysteries which it makes known.

These formulas are soon said, but what do they contain? Of course, every good Christian believes what God has revealed because He has revealed it; but whereas we say that "the just man liveth by faith,"¹⁴ it often happens that we live too little by the supernatural mysteries which are the primary object of divine revelation: the Blessed Trinity and the mysteries of salvation. Our thoughts may tend more toward the natural truths of religion, such as the existence of God as the author of nature, His power, His providence in the natural order, and the spirituality and immortality of the soul. These are all revealed, too, but are accessible to reason and demonstrable as well. Or, if we do think of supernatural mysteries often enough, do we not, for example, dwell too much on the sensible symbolism of divine things when assisting at Mass by paying too much attention to the external

the order of grace. This point of doctrine and its consequences have been developed at length elsewhere. Cf. *De revelatione*, Vol. I, 1st and 2nd ed., pp. 197-217, 337-403, 482-500; *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 56 ff., 269 ff.

¹³ The Council of Orange and the Council of the Vatican.

¹⁴ Rom. 1: 17.

mold, the letter of the liturgy, and all those things within the grasp of our natural faculties?

Some people's faith is so little enlightened that it could be called embryonic and bears no proportion to their literary, scientific, or professional development. Generally our faith is far too weak for us really to live by the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, creation, the elevation of the first man to the life of grace, the redemptive Incarnation, the mission of the Holy Ghost as the special guest and sanctifier of the just, and the beatific vision as reward of those faithful to grace. For many these are colorless and oft-repeated formulas, and their object seems as far removed as the remotest heaven. We fail to let these supernatural truths become the light of our life, points of reference for our judgment on every subject, guiding principles for our thinking. In the obscurity of faith God reveals to us the very object of His own contemplation, that which constitutes His own infinite happiness, and what a pity it is if we do not live by it! The weakness of our faith, our lack of the spirit of faith, becomes especially apparent in adversity, sickness, and in other sufferings badly borne. Our lack of kindness toward our neighbor reveals it, too, for it shows how slow we are to recognize him as a brother called to the same supernatural happiness as we are.

The reason why we believe the truths of faith is that God has revealed them; but it is questionable whether we fully grasp the greatness of this uncreated and wholly supernatural motive. Nominalist theologians and their followers, let it be said, have not recognized it, nor have they grasped what an infinite distance lies between natural knowledge of God as the author of nature and essentially supernatural knowledge of God as the author of grace. Such a supernatural knowledge

of God implies not merely knowing Him as the author of different corporeal and spiritual natures or as the worker of naturally knowable miracles. It implies knowing Him as He is in His inner life, which He Himself has revealed to us, giving our intellects a capacity beyond the natural powers of the greatest angels to adhere to His divine revelation of Himself.¹⁵

Acquired faith, immediately founded on the evidence of miracles, belongs to a far lower order than infused faith and is possessed by the devil himself, although he is bereft of every supernatural gift.¹⁶ Because we fail to grasp fully the sublimity of the formal motive of infused faith, we dwell too much on secondary motives, reasons not for believing supernaturally and infallibly, but for orientating ourselves toward the faith. Motives of this kind are many—the evident harmony of dogma with demonstrated truths, the higher intuition of great philosophers and poets, and our own natural aspirations, whether individual or social, or again with our own personal experience when in a moment of consolation we are given some cognizance of God's action within us. Those called Modernists have placed far too much emphasis on secondary motives like these, confusing them with the formal motive of infused faith. As a result they have failed utterly to recognize the essentially supernatural character of infused faith, so infinitely beyond and above all natural knowledge, whether human or angelic. The final outcome of such a confusion is the reduction of Christian faith to a kind of natural

¹⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 1; q. 4, a. 1; q. 5, a. 1, a. 2, a. 3, ad 1; q. 6, a. 1. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8, a. 9, ad 4. In *Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, ad. 4. *Quodlibet* II, a. 6, ad 3. In *Jouannem*, c. 4, lect. V, no. 2.

¹⁶ IIa IIae, q. 5, a. 2; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 9, ad 4; "*Credere aequivoce dicitur de hominibus et de daemonibus.*"

and Kantian belief in the existence of God and of free will, while denying the whole order of grace. Often men's unconscious and latent confusions lead, if we deduce their consequences, to greater mistakes. In the present instance they would lead to a denial of the essentially supernatural character of the three theological virtues.¹⁷

*God's purification of
our faith*

When God desires to purify our supernatural faith from every natural alloy, He brings out in relief its formal motive and seems even to do away with any secondary motives, for they are not genuine reasons for belief. We no longer have any sensible experience of the divine action within us; only dryness and aridity, not only of the senses but also of the soul, are our portion. The harmony of dogma with the truths of reason is blotted out, and the testimony of the world's greatest thinkers in favor of the faith seems weak indeed. The life of Christ and the lives of His saints as well, seem more wonderful than ever; but the failings of churchmen do much to disconcert us, bringing to mind, it may be, the description of her times drawn by St. Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogue*. Motives of credibility, like miracles and prophecies, no longer have any force for the tormented reason.

Two contrary causes bring all this about: God accords us a new light to lead us away from our too human ways of do-

¹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 2, a. 10 concerning how the natural alloy in a man's actions decreases the merit of the acts of the theological virtues. A human motive intermixed with a divine motive, elicits not a supernatural act, but a concomitant natural act of inferior quality, as would happen in the case of a man who still desired to go to Sunday Mass for a supernatural reason because of a remaining vestige of Christian faith but also does it naturally because it is a family custom and he would no longer go should this custom disappear.

ing things, and the devil makes use of this change, although it both liberates and elevates us, to tempt us and make us fall. As St. John of the Cross shows, we receive at this time a supernatural light that discloses to us the spirit of God's word and obliges us to rise above its letter and our own inferior way of conceiving the divine perfections.¹⁸ The wholly supernatural heights of the mysteries of infinite justice, of predestination, of the Savior's passion, of the salvation and loss of souls, are all illumined by this infused light; the narrow concepts to which we have been used are, in a sense, blown wide open. We stand astonished before inexorable justice, asking how it can be reconciled with unbounded mercy. The question arises before us how such a good God can allow such great evils. Objections formulated by heretics and examined speculatively by theologians present themselves to us, not in the abstract, but at life's core, for example, on the death of father or friend. Everything contributes to the impression that the understanding is lost in the dark, whereas in reality it is flooded with light too strong for its feeble vision. God plunges the soul into the depths of the mysteries of faith and it feels itself sinking and drowning, like a child put down in the sea before it knows how to swim, although held up by the unseen hand of its father. And souls that go down into the troubled sea of the dark night find that the hand of God yet bears them up.

At these times, the Lord also allows the devil to tempt His elect to doubt the existence of eternal life, the redemptive Incarnation, the mystery of grace, and all supernatural realities.¹⁹ To reason about the matter of the temptation

¹⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 5, 8, 9.

¹⁹ Cf. what St. John of the Cross has to say on this subject in *The Living Flame*,

is not the way to meet such an attack. We cannot meet this adversary with arguments; we must turn our back on him in contempt and, although he will bend every effort to keep us from doing so, we must adhere firmly to God's word. As St. John of the Cross says, the devil torments and afflicts the soul in ways that defy the telling, for now two spirits are engaged in open warfare within it.²⁰

Secondary motives all seem poor weak things now. The harmony of dogma with the truths of reason, with philosophic and poetic intuitions, and with human aspirations, appear almost childish. God is, however, making temptation serve His ends. He sustains the soul in secret and, by the gift of understanding, preserves within it, even in times of greatest darkness, its certitude that it must believe,²¹ that it must believe for the single and supernatural reason that God has said it; God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived; God, the First Truth revealing.

What will help us to adhere to the First Truth? Some story from the life of Christ? An account of one of His miracles? Or any of the histories of the Church written by fallible

st. 3, no. 55. *Complete Works of St. John of the Cross* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1934), III, 93. "For the evil one takes his stand, with great cunning, on the road that leads from sense to spirit, deceiving and luring the soul by means of sense, and giving it sensual things, as we have said, so that it may rest in them and not escape from them; and the soul is entrapped with the greatest ease, for it knows of nothing better than this, and thinks not that anything is being lost by it, but rather considers it a great blessing, and receives it readily, thinking that God has come to visit it; and in this way fails to enter into the innermost chamber of the Spouse, but stands at the door to see what is happening. . . . And, if perchance any soul enters into recollection, he labours to bring about its ruin by means of horrors, fears or pains of the body, or by outward sounds and noises, causing it to be distracted by sense, in order to bring it out and distract it from the inner spirit." See too *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 23.

²⁰ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 23.

²¹ *Ila Ilac*, q. 8, a. 2.

men? The rereading perhaps of a good historical and critical treatise of apologetics? Any rational inquiry, no matter how indispensable and unerring, serves only as an inferior disposition for the act of faith; between the two stretches the infinite distance separating nature and grace. To return to such a pursuit would mean going back to discursive reasoning at a time when we need to rise above it and fly over temptation, instead of fighting it with arguments. To succeed, we have to beg ardently for the actual grace of faith and we must also will to believe, for the object and the formal motive of faith is inevident and hidden, and the will must intervene to bring the intellect to give it firm adherence.²²

With God's help, the soul is inwardly led to say the apostles' prayer, "Lord, increase our faith."²³ Lord, give me grace to believe, lift up my intellect to Thee, and to the uncreated Father. Raise my mind to what it cannot naturally attain, the infinite, grant that I may cleave supernaturally to Thyself, the First Truth revealing. Grant that I may believe. Give me refuge from my inconstancies in Thy immutability. I believe in God revealing and in God revealed.²⁴

Presently the full sublimity of the formal motive of faith begins to appear not simply in a speculative but in an experimental way. The First Truth revealing, the authority of God the revealer, is a motive as essentially supernatural as the mysteries to which we hold because of it. It belongs to an

²² *Ila Ilac*, q. 2, a. 1; *ibid.*, ad 3um; q. 2, a. 9.

²³ Luke 17: 5.

²⁴ *Ila Ilac*, q. 2, a. 2; *ibid.*, ad rum. As Cajetan says in *Iam Ilac*, q. 1, a. 1, "*veritas prima est id quo et quod creditur.*" Cf. also *Ila Ilac*, q. 5, a. 3, ad rum; *ibid.*, q. 6, a. 1. Here we see how the Thomistic conception of the essential supernaturality of faith and the formal motive of faith far surpasses the nominalistic view as held by Molina, and de Lugo, and still maintained by many theologians. This point has been shown at length elsewhere, *De revelatione*, chap. 14, a. 3.

order much higher than the natural knowledge of the angels; they too, in their state of wayfaring, had it as a supernatural gift. When faith has been purified and cleansed of every natural alloy, natural knowledge of the signs of revelation—miracles and prophecies—retains its force but we see plainly that it pertains to a much lower domain than the properly divine order, to which the act of infused faith belongs. By infused faith we adhere to revealed mysteries simply because of their infinite weight as truths proposed to us by God for our belief.

In her *Dialogue*²⁵ St. Catherine of Siena says that faith is an infused light received at baptism and serves as the pupil of the eye of the intellect, making us know supernaturally revealed things as though seen with the eye of God. She thought, in fact, that, although we still remain in darkness, we ought to judge human and divine things with the perfect clarity with which God judges them. In sinners, the light of faith is clouded by a stained conscience so that they often judge things according to their own pride, self-love, and sensuality, and not by the spirit of God.

No other way leads to perfect purity of faith but the passive purification of the soul. The infused virtue of faith must become so deeply rooted in our intellect that the intellect can no longer, so to say, do otherwise than judge things human and divine by the spirit of faith. This spirit has to become second nature to it, and at the end of the period of purgation the healed and supernaturalized intellect should tend spontaneously toward divine mysteries and the First Truth revealing, just as the eye turns toward light and color and the mind reaches out to the first principles of reason.

²⁵ Treatise I.

*A higher law
in the order of grace*

That faith is purified in this way is not a notion peculiar to St. John of the Cross and a few other mystics because of the particular way they themselves followed. The apostles' faith went through just such a purification during the dark night of the Passion. They had heard Christ's sublime sermons and seen them confirmed by His holiness and miracles, as well as by all the good works He had done; three of them had been present at His transfiguration on Mount Thabor. But when Jesus was made a prisoner, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified, their faith was sorely tried, despite the fact that the Master had repeatedly foretold everything to them. What a dark night this was for the apostles, "the hour of darkness"²⁶ indeed! Christ seemed overcome and forsaken by God and man, His work brought to nothing.

The Blessed Virgin, St. John, and Mary Magdalen remained at the foot of the cross. Not for a moment did the Blessed Virgin stop believing that her Son was the Word of God made flesh, the Savior of mankind, and that in three days He would arise again as He had said. She alone grasped the full meaning of the seven last words of the agonizing Christ. When she heard the *Consummatum est* she understood that our apparently defeated Lord had conquered sin and Satan and she knew, too, that Christ's victory on Good Friday was greater than His triumph over death by His glorious resurrection. Death being the result of sin, the resurrection of the body is only the sign and result of His great

²⁶ Luke 22: 53.

victory over sin. Mary the Co-Redemptress understood this in the dark night of the Passion according to the measure of her union with Christ the Redeemer. John and Mary Magdalen continued to believe in proportion to the light and love given to them by our Lord in His last hours.

What Christ had foretold of the other apostles came true: "Behold the hour cometh, and it is now come, that you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. . . . In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world."²⁷ Christ warned Peter particularly: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren."²⁸ Immediately afterward our Lord made known to Peter that he would deny Him. The apostles were indeed sifted by tribulation, thus learning their own powerlessness and frailty and seeing their faith itself apparently on the point of shipwreck; but Christ sustained them, and Peter failed only through weakness in the external confession of his faith, immediately afterward weeping abundant tears for his sin. The graces of Easter and of Pentecost confirmed his faith and the faith of his brethren for all time. They had had their dark night and, if we would share in their intimacy with Christ, we must first follow them into the shadows.

The passive purification of faith occurs in some way in the lives of all the saints, although it may take different forms, being sometimes entirely interior, sometimes mixed with the sufferings of the apostolate. It can be safely said that in

²⁷ John 16: 32.

²⁸ Luke 22: 31.

the depth of every interior soul some cross of mind or heart is to be found, and none can really know that soul while unaware of the cause of its hidden suffering. All the saints have had to carry the cross and follow our Lord along the way of sorrows, praying in the depths of their hearts that God would grant them the grace to bear within them the death of Christ. Make me a bearer of Christ's death in the company of Mary and John and the holy women around the cross.

For ten years Blessed Henry Suso had temptations against faith. St. Vincent de Paul passed four years in this kind of torment, becoming a spiritual martyr, for he no longer quite knew whether he had or had not consented to temptation and could reassure himself only by holding to his heart a little piece of paper on which he had written the *Credo*.²⁹ In her last years St. Teresa of the Child Jesus also had to make her way through this dark tunnel; what she tells us of her trial brings the doctrine of St. John of the Cross down to the concrete for us. If we are to resist temptation and reach the place our Lord desires us to have, we must perform heroic acts of faith at this time. Such acts at once obtain a great increase of the infused virtue so that it receives a tenfold or even the promised hundredfold increase.

When the time of purgation comes to a close, the night of the soul becomes a sparkling and delightful night, according to the verse which St. John of the Cross loves to quote: "and night shall be my light in my pleasure."³⁰ Stars appear only after the sun has set and thus, too, supernatural mysteries shine forth only when the soul knows how to make a perfect sacrifice of reason in the order of grace, not permitting it to

²⁹ Cf. Abelly, *Vie de saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: Debécourt, 1843), III, 167.

³⁰ Ps. 138: 11.

attempt to cross the boundaries of the region accessible to it.³¹ Souls walking in darkness have often been enlightened after calling on St. Thomas Aquinas. He often obtains for them the grace to rise above their affliction, to look down upon it and see the end to which its darkness leads.

The passive purification of faith having been achieved, the soul is fully convinced that only supernatural truth and reality matter and everything else is only, as it were, a shadow of reality. It comes to understand how truly the Book of Wisdom says: "I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom

³¹ To give a more concrete idea of such purification we shall quote from a manuscript giving the response of a soul of deep faith especially tempted against the mystery of the Incarnation. It sometimes seemed to her, especially at Communion, as though it were absolutely impossible. What liberal Protestants say about the absurd descent of the metaphysical, the divine, and the eternal into the temporal, she would experience with singular intensity; the infinite distance between the divine nature and the human nature of Christ struck her so forcibly that their union seemed incapable of realization and irreconcilable with God's infinite mercy. St. Paul's words, *exinanivit semetipsum* ("He emptied himself"), rose up like an insurmountable stumbling block before her, and the annihilation of the cross became a scandal to her, as it was and still is for the Jews.

Her director once asked her, "But you have never seriously doubted the Incarnation?" She gave her answer in writing, part of which is quoted here:

"If by that you mean that I have never voluntarily doubted, Father, then I hope not, although I cannot, however, assert it absolutely, for there are times when I do not know where my will lies. But if by 'doubting seriously' you mean finding myself faced with absolute negation and only able desperately to repeat acts of faith while wholly powerless to free myself but with the stubborn impression that such simple formulas avail nothing—this is what happens to me constantly and haunts and harasses me some days until I am worn out. Where is my will then? I wish to hope that it is wholly on the side of that self which repeats the formulas and tries to abandon itself to God, in spite of the terrible sensation of falling down into emptiness. As far as I am able to judge at the very same time I would give my life with joy for the least truth of faith, unless I am deluding myself. During thanksgiving after Communion, all this redoubles in intensity. If I could tell you what my Communion was yesterday and today, Father, you would have pity on me and would see that I have not the strength to bear this daily. I beg you, give me permission to communicate only when I hope to be capable of it without provoking these assaults which confuse and shake me. I know well that afterward I shall reproach myself and find a greater emptiness within me than before, but at least I shall be sure of not having offended God."

came upon me. And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her . . . for all gold in comparison of her is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light; for her light cannot be put out."³² This is the kingdom of God, the pearl of great price, for which a man sells all that he has that he may buy it.³³ Those who have understood and experienced these things have almost always left in the depths of their souls a memory of God, an obscure contemplation of His infinite perfection.

The purification of faith proceeds thus and, until the Lord has completely purged the soul in the way that He wills, "no means or remedy is of any service or profit for the relief of its affliction . . . until the spirit is humbled, softened, and purified, one with the Spirit of God, according to the degree of union of love which His mercy is pleased to grant it."³⁴

³² Wisd., 7: 7.

³³ Matt. 13: 46.

³⁴ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 7.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a work of the fourteenth century, anticipates St. John of the Cross by the way in which he speaks of divine obscurity, which is nothing other than God's inner life, the Deity, above being, truth, goodness, wisdom, love, all of which the Godhead contains formally and eminently, much more truly and fully than white light contains light of other colors, for they are to be found in it only virtually.

In the eighth chapter of this work we read: "And just as it is an unlawful thing, and would hinder a man that sat in his meditations, were he then to consider his outward bodily works, the which he had done or should do, although they were never so holy works in themselves: surely it is as unlawful a thing, and would as much hinder a man that should work in this darkness and in this *cloud of unknowing* with an affectuous stirring of love to God for himself, were he to let any thought or any meditation of God's wonderful gifts, kindness, and works in any of his creatures, bodily or ghostly, rise upon him to press betwixt him and his God; although they be never so holy thoughts, nor so pleasing, nor so comfortable.

"And for this reason it is that I bid thee put down such a sharp subtle thought and cover him with a thick *cloud of forgetting*, be he never so holy and promise

he never so well to help thee in thy purpose. For why, love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing." Ed. Dom Justin McCann (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1943), pp. 16 f.

This recalls the doctrine often set forth by St. Thomas that, although knowledge draws God down to us and in some way imposes upon Him the limitations of our ideas, love lifts us up to Him and attains to Him without intermediary (Ila Ilae, q. 27, a. 4, 5). Love is led toward what remains most obscure in God, to His inner and ineffable life, to the Deity, for our minds a great darkness. This is why the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* often says we must penetrate this cloud of love, that is, we must tend toward God and His inner life with all the force of our charity in the obscurity of faith. In the same work, see also chaps. 5, 9, 36-44, 72-75.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF HOPE

When faith has undergone its purgation, the passive purification of hope almost always follows immediately, as in the conversion of a sinner an act of hope follows upon an act of faith. The Lord goes back over the same furrow that He has already plowed, further deepening it. The soul is now convinced that the only reality that matters, the one thing necessary, is eternal life, but it wonders whether it can ever attain to it.

Hope is an essentially supernatural virtue by which we tend toward God as our supreme beatitude, while relying on His mercy and all-powerful help to bring us to Him. The primary object of hope is the possession of God for all eternity; the formal motive of this theological virtue is God as our helper, *Deus auxilians*, just as the formal motive of faith is God as the revealer, *Veritas prima revelans*.

Surely we have hope, for we desire to reach God and to possess Him forever and we often ask for the grace to be saved; but do we not somehow allow our hope to go straggling after temporal goods? These are things which we may deem useful for our salvation but which really are not, human goods which God knows will be harmful for us and prevent our having those greater goods that would come to

us through detachment and humility. And is there no alloy in the motive inspiring our hope? Certainly we hope; but do we not place too much confidence in ourselves, in our knowing how, our energy, our friends, in all the different human helps which we find at hand and which, when taken away, leave us discouraged and at a loss? ¹

God's part in the purgation of hope

To purify our hope, to give us a better understanding of its true object and pure motive, the good God may take away from us all temporal goods that are dear to us: position, apparently deserved honors, influence, and the human help that we can expect of friends. It may be that, by a special and mysterious dispensation of Providence, superiors who have always shown esteem for us, no longer give any evidence of confidence in us, without, however, being at fault in the matter. At the same time we awaken to our own frailty and powerlessness and the gravity of our sins, and if unlooked-for obstacles rise up before us in our work and we meet stubborn opposition, calumnies, and illness, too, and all the natural props that once sustained us are withdrawn, shall we not still hope against all human hope for the sole and entirely supernatural motive that God has lost nothing of His infinite power to help us?

The saints have hoped with hope like this, placing their trust in divine grace, knowing that it is always offered for our salvation, believing firmly that the Lord does not first abandon us. The cry, "Never permit me to be separated from Thee," has gone up continually to God. Secure my hope.

¹ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 2, a. 10.

Grant that I may hope, whatever happens. "*In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum.*"² When Job had been despoiled of everything, he kept on hoping in God, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord."³ St. John the Baptist, having announced the kingdom of God and then seen it set upon by all the powers of the world, never gave up hoping in his prison. The apostles, and all the martyrs, too, had hope in the midst of persecution. Thrown into a dungeon with hardly enough light at any time of the day to say the Divine Office, St. John of the Cross did not relinquish his hope, although he could no longer see anything but obstacles to the work which it was his mission to accomplish.

Those passing through the night of the soul should hope against all hope, too. The supernatural light which God makes use of for their purification reveals so clearly the height of the ideal to be attained, the greatness of Christian perfection, that they are convinced they have done nothing as yet to reach it, and that everything still remains to be done. As the Curé of Ars grew daily more enlightened in regard to the priesthood, his thoughts and feelings were of this kind, for the end to be attained seemed to him to be far, far, from what he was. The glimpses of the ideal which the soul catches in the God-given light accorded to it, make it perceive its own contrasting miseries so well, St. John of the Cross says, that it feels as if it were dying a cruel spiritual death, or as if God had rejected it in abhorrence and flung it into dark-

² Ps. 70: 1.

³ Job 1: 21.

ness.⁴ It feels itself to be empty and poor, a stranger to grace.⁵ Added to all this are memories of happier times for, as a rule, such people have received many consolations from God and have served Him zealously. When they are deprived of happiness and convinced that it will not return, they suffer twice as much because of His remembered bounty.⁶

Furthermore, the Lord now allows these souls to be tempted by the devil, who seeks to attack the work of God and of the guardian angels on their own ground, trying to close off the approach to divine union, attempting to terrify, disturb, and harass.⁷ He tempts souls especially against the mystery of predestination, against the righteousness of God's good pleasure, to make them see it as nothing more than an arbitrary caprice on His part. A voice seems to say to them: "If you are predestined, whatever you do you will be saved; if you are not, of what good are your prayers and struggles to make progress?" A wise director will answer to such suggestions: "That is just as silly as if a farmer were to say: 'If Providence has decreed for me to have wheat next summer, what good is it for me to till and sow? If the harvest is not to be, the work will be so much loss.' Such talk is foolishness, because Providence and predestination have to do not only with ends, but with the means leading there. Plow and sow if you wish to see the harvest." Sometimes the director can recall St. Catherine of Siena's tit-for-tat answer to the devil: "If I am predestined, what good are your efforts to bring about my ruin? And if I am not, why give yourself so much

⁴ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 23.

trouble?" Nevertheless, as St. Teresa remarks, the understanding of anybody so tempted is clouded and incapable of grasping the truth. It believes everything represented by the imagination and whatever foolery is suggested by the devil.⁸

The evil voice keeps on: "Perhaps you are predestined but you do not know it. How, then, can you have any sure hope?" The devil would like to make us believe that the certitude of hope lacks validity because it is not speculative like the certitude of faith, because it does not rest on the very fact of salvation itself. But our salvation is not certain: we can resist God's grace and, as a result, be deprived of other divine helps, perhaps the grace of a good death. Not only is the soul conscious of this fact, but it also believes that it discovers indications to the contrary and fears reprobation. Henry Suso knew fears such as this when the devil would say to him: "Of what use are good works to you, since you are already condemned? Why do you struggle against the eternal decrees of God?"⁹

Full of compassion, a spiritual director can reply with St. Thomas that hope has not the same kind of certitude as faith. Faith's certitude in revealed mysteries is speculative whereas hope's is practical, a certitude grounded on a tendency infallibly directed toward the end to be attained, a trust in a God infinitely powerful and ready to help, who has given us divine promises of assistance.¹⁰ We must not attempt to search into the unfathomable designs of God,¹¹ and one of the signs of predestination is found precisely in great interior

⁸ *Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansion, chap. 1.

⁹ "Leben Seuses," Fr. tr., G. Thiriou, O.P. (Paris: Lecoffre, 1899); *Œuvres mystiques du B. Henri Suso*.

¹⁰ *Ila Ilac*, q. 18, a. 4.

¹¹ Cf. *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 58.

trials like these. Whoever bears them in union with our Lord, repeating the seven words which He Himself uttered during His agony, has a certain participation in the redemptive Passion. Evildoers may often, on the contrary, drink iniquity like water and in apparent tranquillity.

Answers of this kind fail to suffice when temptation grows more violent. St. Teresa tells us that during such storms we are incapable of receiving any consolation.¹² From Angela of Foligno we hear the same cry uttered so long ago by Jeremias. She says, "I no longer have any hope,"¹³ just as he exclaimed: "I am the man that sees my poverty by the rod of His indignation. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, and not into light. Only against me He hath turned, and turned again His hand all the day. My skin and my flesh He hath made old, He hath broken my bones. He hath built round about me. . . . He hath built against me round about, that I may not get out. . . . Yea, and when I cry and entreat, He hath shut out my prayer. He hath shut up my ways with square stones, . . . He hath made me desolate. He hath bent His bow, and set me as a mark for His arrows. . . . He hath filled me with bitterness. . . . And my soul is removed far off from peace, I have forgotten good things. And I said: My end and my hope is perished from the Lord."¹⁴

To overcome such temptations we, too, must make the same ardent prayer that the prophet then went on to add: "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because His commiserations have not failed; . . . therefore will I wait for Him."¹⁵ Lord, the tested soul cries, give me hope,

¹² *Op. cit.*, Sixth Mansion, chap. 1.

¹³ *Acta sanctorum*, January 4, chap. 2, no. 26.

¹⁴ Lam. 3: 1-18.

¹⁵ Lam. 3: 22-24.

bring my hope back to life. And the soul never utters such a cry in vain. It may not always feel that it has been heard, but it keeps on praying, and that in itself is a sign that God has harkened to it for, without a new actual grace, prayer would not continue to well up from the heart. "You would not be seeking Me, had you not already found Me."

Sometimes temptations redouble, and the soul again cries out with the prophet: "Thou, O Lord, art just, if I plead with Thee, but yet I will speak what is just to Thee: Why doth the way of the wicked prosper: why is it well with all them that transgress, and do wickedly?"¹⁶ "How long, O Lord, shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? Shall I cry out to Thee suffering violence, and Thou wilt not save?"¹⁷ Job in his grief went much farther still: "One thing there is that I have spoken, let Him kill at once, and not laugh at the pains of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked."¹⁸ For a little while it may be the soul yields completely to the temptation to murmur. Sometimes even the urge to blasphemy raises its head.

For this reason we must beg God anew to give us hope in Him, to create within us trust in His mercy: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed: save me, and I shall be saved: for Thou art my praise."¹⁹ "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted: renew our days, as from the beginning."²⁰ "Arise, O Lord, help us and redeem us for Thy name's sake."²¹ Then, with persevering prayer, heroic hope

¹⁶ Jer. 12: 1.

¹⁷ Hab. 1: 1.

¹⁸ Job 9: 22-24.

¹⁹ Jer. 17: 14.

²⁰ Lam. 5: 21.

²¹ Ps. 43: 26.

mounts higher and higher in the soul like a forgotten leitmotiv, very sweet and very strong, and soon becoming salient until, with a great burst of song, the soul hymns its complete trust and perfect abandonment. "For the Lord will not cast off forever. For if He hath cast off, He will also have mercy, according to the multitude of His mercies."²² "The Lord killeth and maketh alive, He bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again."²³ "But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."²⁴ "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded."²⁵ The soul has a presentiment of the Savior's answer: "You shall want for help only when I have none to give."

Under the higher illumination of the gift of understanding, the soul discovers, as if at a glance, the infinite superiority of the formal motive of hope: almighty God as our help. What matter all the sorrows, the disillusionments, and contradictions of the world, if I reach the end of my journey to eternity? And what are the helps of men in comparison to those of God who never first abandons us? Permit me not, O Lord, to be separated from Thee. Grant that I may hope in Thee unto the end. In Thy hands my salvation is incomparably more secure than in my own.²⁶

²² Lam. 3: 31.

²³ I Kings 2: 6.

²⁴ Isa. 40: 31.

²⁵ Ps. 30: 2.

²⁶ It has sometimes been said that the Thomistic doctrine of grace cannot be reconciled with hope, an objection which is none other than that which presents itself to the mind during the night of the soul. St. Thomas' answer is that the formal motive of our hope cannot be our human effort, as though it were capable of making God's grace efficacious; its formal motive is almighty God as our helper; from Him proceeds intrinsically efficacious grace. Everything that has just been

The first star has already appeared in the night of the soul: God, the First Truth revealing. Now a second star becomes brighter and brighter: God our helper. Beneath Him shine the two great mediators: Christ our Savior and Mary, His Mother and our aid. The soul really knows how powerless all natural energy is to accomplish the least supernatural act and with what truth St. Paul has said: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God."²⁷ "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good

said about the passive purification of hope strongly confirms St. Thomas' doctrine, which is exactly in line with St. Paul's and St. Augustine's and has its basis in our Lord's words, "Without Me you can do nothing."

Giving an account of her conversion, St. Teresa relates: "I used to pray to our Lord for help; but, as it now seems to me, I must have committed the fault of not putting my whole trust in His Majesty, and of not thoroughly distrusting myself. . . . I wished to live, but I saw clearly that I was not living . . . there was no one to give me life, and I was not able to take it. He Who could have given it me had good reasons for not coming to my aid, seeing that He had brought me back to Himself so many times, and I as often had left Him.

"It came to pass one day, when I went into the oratory, that I saw a statue which they had put by there . . . a representation of Christ most grievously wounded. . . . So keenly did I feel the evil return I had made for those wounds, that I thought my heart was breaking . . . and implored Him to strengthen me once for all, so that I might never offend Him any more.

"I had a very great devotion to the glorious Magdalene, and very frequently used to think of her conversion—especially when I went to communion. But this last time . . . I seem to have made greater progress; for I was now very distrustful of myself, placing all my confidence in God. It seems to me that I said to Him then that I would not rise up till He granted my petition. I do certainly believe that this was of great service to me, because I have grown better ever since." *Life*, David Lewis, tr. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Book Shop, 1944), pp. 64-66.

Here St. Teresa shows that she finally understood that even our cooperation with grace comes from God; this doctrine, understood as she comprehended it, does not cause us to cross our arms and rest in quietistic sloth; on the contrary it leads us to give more sustained attention to the divine promptings and to practice greater fidelity. If we demand too little of ourselves, it is because we fail sufficiently to consider the fact that "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish." "Lord," said St. Augustine, "give what Thou commandest and then command what Thou wilt."

²⁷ II Cor. 3: 5.

will."²⁸ The same thought is expressed elsewhere in Scripture: "As the divisions of waters, so the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; whithersoever He will He shall turn it."²⁹ "Who hath first given to Him?"³⁰ "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."³¹ "And there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who worketh all in all."³² "For in Him we live and move and are."³³ "For of Him and by Him and in Him are all things."³⁴ The sweet and terrible mystery of predestination is no longer a stumbling block. The soul fully grasps the distance between the perfect holiness of God's good pleasure and the arbitrary nature of caprice and it says with St. Teresa that the harder divine things are to understand, the more devotion it has for them.³⁵ Their obscurity arises not because of any absurdity or incoherence on their part but because of the feebleness of the eyes that look upon their light.

*Satan's part
in the purgation of hope*

In the twenty-third chapter of the second book of *The Dark Night*, St. John of the Cross makes it quite clear that in the passive purification of hope both the divine illuminating action and the activity of the devil are at work at one and the same time. Satan desires to keep the soul from mak-

²⁸ Phil. 2: 13.

²⁹ Prov. 21: 1.

³⁰ Rom. 11: 35.

³¹ Rom. 9: 16.

³² I Cor. 12: 6.

³³ Acts 17: 28.

³⁴ Rom. 11: 36.

³⁵ *Life*, chap. 28.

ing progress, but God shows us how He makes use of His enemy's tempting to serve His own high purposes.

Wherefore, the more spiritual, the more interior, and the more remote from the senses is the communication, the farther does the devil fall short of understanding it.

And thus it is of great importance for the security of the soul that its inward communion with God should be of such a kind that its very sense of the lower part will remain in darkness and be without knowledge of it, and attain not to it . . . let it be a secret between the spirit and God alone.

It is quite true that oftentimes, when these very intimate and secret spiritual communications are present and take place in the soul, although the devil cannot get to know of what kind and manner they are, yet the great repose and silence which some of them cause in the senses and the faculties of the sensual part make it clear to him that they are taking place and that the soul is receiving a certain blessing from them. And then, as he sees that he cannot succeed in thwarting them in the depth of the soul, he does what he can to disturb and disquiet the sensual part, to which he is able to attain—now by means of afflictions, now by terrors and fears, with intent to disquiet and disturb the higher and spiritual part of the soul by this means, with respect to that blessing which it then receives and enjoys. But often, when the communication of such contemplation makes its naked assault upon the soul and exerts its strength upon it, the devil, with all his diligence, is unable to disturb it. . . .

At other times, when the spiritual communication is not made in any great measure to the spirit, but the senses have a part therein, the devil more easily succeeds in disturbing the spirit . . . the devil is occasionally able to see certain favours which God is pleased to grant the soul when they are bestowed upon it by the mediation of a good angel . . . partly so that he may do that which he can against them according to the measure of justice . . . in proportion

as God is guiding the soul and communing with it, He gives the devil leave to act with it after this manner. . . .

At other times the devil prevails and plunges the soul into a perturbation and horror which is a greater affliction to it than any torment in this life could be. For, as this horrible communication passes direct from spirit to spirit, in something like nakedness and clearly distinguished from all that is corporeal, it is grievous beyond what every sense can feel; and this lasts in the spirit for some time, yet not for long, for otherwise the spirit would be driven forth from the flesh by the vehement communication of the other spirit. Afterwards there remains to it the memory thereof, which is sufficient to cause it great affliction.

All that we have here described comes to pass in the soul passively, without its doing or undoing anything of itself with respect to it. But it must be known in this connection that, when the good angel permits the devil to gain this advantage of assailing the soul with this spiritual horror, he does it to purify the soul and to prepare it by means of this spiritual vigil for some great spiritual favour and festival which he desires to grant it, for he never mortifies save to give life, neither humbles save to exalt, which comes to pass shortly afterwards. Then, according as was the dark and horrible purgation which the soul suffered, so is the fruition now granted it of a wondrous and delectable spiritual contemplation, sometimes so lofty that there is no language to describe it. But the spirit has been greatly refined by the preceding horrors of the evil spirit, in order that it may be able to receive this blessing.³⁶

Earlier, when speaking of the yearning love which the soul experiences as its purgation progresses, St. John of the Cross says: "For it rises up by night (that is, in this purgative darkness) according to the affections of the will. And with the yearnings and vehemence of the lioness or the she-bear go-

³⁶ *The Dark Night*, Bk. IV, chap. 23.

ing to seek her cubs when they have been taken away from her and she finds them not, does this wounded soul go forth to seek its God. For, being in darkness, it feels itself to be without Him and to be dying of love for Him. And this is that impatient love wherein the soul cannot long subsist without gaining its desire or dying. Such was Rachel's desire for children when she said to Jacob: Give me children, else I shall die.³⁷ Suffering like this gives us some idea of what the souls in purgatory endure spiritually when they have reached the end of their purification and ardently desire the vision of God.³⁸

*Pure hope and true abandonment
to God's will*

Now it becomes strikingly evident how mistaken the quietists are in counseling souls tried in this way and tempted to despair to make a sacrifice of their salvation on the pretext of attaining to pure love, just when they ought, with God's help, to be making heroic acts of hope.³⁹ Grace does not destroy but really perfects nature. Now man's will being specified by the good, he cannot do otherwise than will his own happiness, his final end.⁴⁰ Besides, the virtue of hope, far from being incompatible with perfect charity, draws more and more life from it. By hope we desire God, our supreme good, and subordinate ourselves to Him, instead of subordinating Him to ourselves.⁴¹ By charity we love Him

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. 13.

³⁸ See St. Catherine of Genoa on this point.

³⁹ For propositions condemned as contrary to the faith, cf. Denzinger. The propositions of Molinos, no. 1232; the propositions of Fenelon, nos. 1334, 1335, 1338.

⁴⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q. 82, a. 1; Ia IIae, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2um and a. 8.

⁴¹ The virtue of hope is connected, in St. Thomas' opinion, with the love of concupiscence, which makes us will our own good, and is inferior to the love

for Himself and desire our salvation so that we may glorify Him eternally. Any of us who endure trials of this nature should certainly accept them as long as it pleases God for them to last⁴² but this is not making a sacrifice of our salvation. Any such sacrifice would include giving up the pure desire to glorify God eternally—something contrary to the very nature of our will and of charity.⁴³

The Church answers the counsels of the quietists with the words of the Psalms: "Preserve me, O Lord, for I have put my trust in Thee."⁴⁴ "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded."⁴⁵ "Behold, God is my savior, I will deal confidently, and will not fear: because the Lord is my

of friendship, which makes us will good to God, His glory, the radiation of His goodness in understanding and loving hearts. But we should distinguish between the love of concupiscence for things below us and the love of concupiscence for things above us. If I desire some fruit, I desire it for myself and because of myself, for my own sake, *mihi et propter me*; I subordinate it to myself. Whereas when I desire God, it is indeed for myself that I desire His supreme goodness, but I do not desire it because of myself, for my own sake, *propter me*; to subordinate it to myself as a means to an end, would be a perversion. God is the supreme good and my last end; by hope and by every act of real virtue I am ordered to Him; by charity I love Him for Himself and desire that for His own sake He be eternally known and loved. On this subject, see Cajetan, in *Iam Ilae*, q. 17, a. 5, no. 6.

⁴² On abandonment to the will of God, see the following works: Alexandre Piny, O.P., *La plus parfaite des voies interieures, ou la voie d'abandon* (1683); De Caussade, S.J., *Self-abandonment to Providence*, tr. Thorold (London: Burns, Oates, 1933); Lehodey, O.C.R., *Holy Abandonment* (Dublin: Gill, 1948). Abandonment to the divine will should tower like a great peak above the two extremes and opposing errors of (1) quietism, which denies the necessity of our cooperation and sacrifices all hope; (2) Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism, which so exalts our cooperation as to belittle God's sovereign dominion and the efficacy of divine grace. The true doctrine of abandonment recognizes that even our cooperation comes from God's grace: "Without Me you can do nothing." It sustains our hope by telling us that our salvation is incomparably better assured in God's hands than in our own and makes us say always, "Never permit me to be separated from Thee, O Lord."

⁴³ Cf. Vol. I, chap. 2 of the present work.

⁴⁴ Ps. 15: 1.

⁴⁵ Ps. 30: 2.

strength, and my praise, and He is become my salvation."⁴⁶ The purified soul comes at last to sing of God's power: "The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength. I shall not die, but live: and shall declare the works of the Lord."⁴⁷ An act of abandonment is united to its acts of perfect hope and perfect charity. "I love Thee, O my God, more than myself and above all things and I abandon myself to Thee, that Thou mayst give me to love Thee and glorify Thee eternally. My salvation is incomparably more assured in Thy hands than in mine. I adore Thy infinite justice and confide myself to Thy mercy."

In the midst of trials and calumnies saints have spoken these profound words: in the injustice of men we find the justice of God for the purgation of our hidden sins. During His passion our innocent Lord saw better than anyone else ever has seen how God's justice lies in the injustice of men. That justice weighed upon Him, a victim in our stead, and He adored it with perfect abandonment, the fruit of love for God in this world.

When the great purification of hope has been accomplished, the soul understands the entire meaning and full beauty of the psalm, *Confitemini Domino*: "Give praise to the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever. . . . In my trouble I called upon the Lord: and the Lord heard me, and enlarged me. The Lord is my helper. I will not fear what men can do unto me. . . . It is good to trust in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man. . . . The Lord is my strength and my praise: and He is become my salvation. . . . I shall not die, but live: and shall declare

⁴⁶ Isa. 12: 2.

⁴⁷ Ps. 117: 16.

the works of the Lord."⁴⁸ Then indeed the Lord appears as the author of our salvation: "I am, I am the Lord: and there is no savior besides Me."⁴⁹ The soul knows as if experimentally that it is made for eternal life; it has a burning desire to possess God, yet God does not show Himself to it; and so begins its final purgation, the purification of charity or of love.

Some penetrating pages on this subject are to be found in *La Croix de Jésus*, written in 1647 by Louis Chardon, a Dominican. As remarked earlier,⁵⁰ the basic idea of this beautiful dogmatic and mystical book is that Christ's fullness of grace produced two great effects within His soul: first, the highest kind of happiness, an unalterable peace, that lasted even during the Passion, and secondly, an ardent desire for the cross as the means of our salvation, a desire which reduced Christ's blessed soul to grief and anguish. Although the second effect seems contrary to the first, it springs from it, just as the charity that drove Christ to save our souls proceeded from His love for the Father. Louis Chardon shows clearly not only how these two effects were reproduced in the souls of the Blessed Mother and the great saints but also how they ought to be found, too, in different degrees, in all members of Christ's mystical body, according to the measure of their union with Him. He shows plainly how Christ is at once the source of grace and the principle of the cross, giving those intimately united to Him a share in His

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Isa. 43: 11.

⁵⁰ Vol. I, Part I, chap. 4. Cf. this work, soon to be given another publication by Lethielleux, Paris, in its original text. See 2^{me} entretien, "Des diverses sortes de consolations et de désolations par lesquelles Dieu se communique aux âmes saintes."

own deep peace, even when they are enduring those purifying and redemptive sufferings which, through the mystical body, in some way continue His passion until the end of time.

In accordance with these principles we do well frequently to ask God to make known to us the obstacles that we more or less consciously place in the way of grace. At times souls hear the question: Wilt thou be perfect? They cannot help but answer: "Lord, if it is Thy desire to purify me, then purify me, even if it means that I must suffer much, even if it means that I must shed my blood for Thee."

CHAPTER IX

THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF CHARITY

Charity, like faith and hope, needs to be freed from every natural alloy in order to operate with utmost purity in the order of grace, so far above everything natural, no matter how richly endowed. In fact, charity has a special need for purgation because of the existence of a counterfeit charity compounded of culpable indulgence and weakness or humanitarian sentimentality. It seeks the sanction of true charity and, by its contact, often sullies it.¹ The chief conflict of our day is not between what is good and what is evidently and cynically malicious, but between true and false charity. What was said of false Christs in the Gospel could apply to this so-called charity: "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets."² They are more dangerous when covert than when openly known as real enemies of the Church.

Optimi corruptio pessima. The worse kind of corruption is that which attacks the best in us, the highest of the theological virtues. If there is nothing in the world better than true charity, there is nothing worse than false, for the more an apparent good resembles some real and great good the more it attracts and imperils us. If foolishness and more or less con-

¹ In this sense the encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Mortalium animos*, observes that pan-Christians are so absorbed in achieving the union of all the Churches that they forget that charity cannot triumph through working harm to the faith on which it is founded.

² Matt. 24: 24.

scious cowardice leads those who ought to represent true charity to give occasional approval to the false, incalculable evil may result. Persecutors accomplish much less for they fight in the open, and we are clearly bound to oppose them or, if need be, to give our Lord the testimony of our blood in martyrdom. More could be said, but this is not the place for it. Yet a simple glance at the subject can give us a deeper appreciation of the necessity for purifying charity to free it of all dross, of all that seemingly resembles it but really forms only a silly or perverse caricature of virtue.³

To remind ourselves how much more we need the purifying cross than most of us think, we have only to notice how much that is human insinuates itself into works for God. When the Lord desires to make one of His servants a saint, the divine will may be terrible on poor human nature. Years of suffering come, when the soul must carry the cross daily; but after it has passed through the time of trial, it rejoices because of what it has been through, understanding at the last something of the necessity of the cross for Christian life. Without the cross no Christian can become spiritual and really live the divine life, so mercifully accorded to us.

*The essential features
of the purgation of charity*

The purification of charity has many different phases; St.

³ A fool, it has been said, is a dangerous weapon in some hands. We would willingly put up with fools if they were not so pleased with themselves. It takes effort to keep your own head while trying to get some common sense into theirs. If irony did not come to our aid, we could not keep our tempers with them. Christian charity might find a better way of expressing these observations but should not ignore the truth that they contain. The fear of rash judgment ought not to make us dupes; none have been kinder to their fellow men than the saints and none have been quicker to detect the artfulness and deceit of the enemy of good.

Teresa speaks of the last, which precedes entrance into transforming union, saying of it:

She [the soul] sees herself still far away from God, yet with her increased knowledge of His attributes her longing and her love for Him grow ever stronger as she learns more fully how this great God and Sovereign deserves to be loved. As, year by year her yearning after Him gradually becomes keener, she experiences the bitter suffering I am about to describe. . . . Perhaps you will say this is an imperfection, and you may ask why she does not conform herself to the will of God since she has so completely surrendered herself to it. Hitherto she has been able to do so and she consecrated her life to it; but now she cannot because her reason is reduced to such a state that she is no longer mistress of herself, nor can she think of anything but what tends to increase her torment. . . . She is like one suspended in mid-air, who can neither touch the earth nor mount to heaven; she is unable to reach the water while parched with thirst and this is not a thirst that can be borne, but one which nothing will quench nor would she have it quenched save with the water of which our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman, but this is not given to her.⁴

Although the soul suffers so much and "seems dying from its desire for death," the saint says that it is conscious, even while suffering, that its suffering is a great boon.

In other words, the purification of love takes place in even greater darkness than the purgation of faith and of hope. This may be owing to either of two reasons: because the soul is still very imperfect; or because it has made a special offering of itself as a victim for sinners, and God has accepted its oblation. An attempt will be made here to outline the essential characteristics of this purification without emphasizing

⁴ *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, chap. 11.

its various phases. Afterward we shall see what it is like when accompanied by a special share in our Lord's role of victim.

Charity is that supernatural virtue which makes us love God for His own sake because He is infinitely good in Himself, and our neighbor as well, not just because of his natural qualities or the good things that we receive from him, but for love of God, who has loved him and called him, as He has called us, to glorify Him eternally. Charity is then real friendship, a mutual love of benevolence between God, the author of grace, and the just man enlivened by grace, a sharer in the intimate life of the Most High.⁵ God's love for us is not a response to any lovable-ness already in us but is itself the cause of our lovable-ness.⁶ Since God shares His intimate life with us and wills to make His eternal happiness ours, we in turn model our love on His, rejoicing that He is God, that He possesses infinite perfections, His wisdom, His holiness, and His happiness, and we will Him to be known, loved, and glorified as the First Truth and the Supreme Good deserve to be known, loved, and glorified.

The formal motive of the love of friendship between our Father in heaven and His children is therefore the uncreated Goodness as supernaturally known by faith to be supremely lovable, infinitely more lovable than any gifts that come to us from Him. To love God not merely for Himself but for the good things that we have received or hope to receive from Him falls short of being an act of charity, although a consideration of God's benefits disposes us for a better knowledge of the sovereignly lovable divine goodness. Charity and perfect gratitude rise above the love of benefits to love the

⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 23, a. 1.

⁶ Ia, q. 20, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 110, a. 1.

Benefactor Himself.⁷ It is in this sense that God ought to be loved for Himself,⁸ and if charity leads us to desire our own happiness, it does so for a motive higher than mere hope,⁹ out of the will to glorify God eternally, so that His infinite goodness may be known and loved as He deserves: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory."¹⁰

The just, even when still imperfect, possess charity, although many faults, such as unconscious egoism, self-love, pride, sensuality, and sloth, may keep it company. Even though charity makes us love God for Himself, we often dwell too much on the benefits of all kinds that He bestows on us, such as the sensible or spiritual consolations accorded to us in prayer which make Him felt, so to say, within us. Charity makes us love others, too, for love of God, but affection and gratitude also bind us to them. And who can tell what motive prevails in some affections, the divine or the human; and who knows whether the human is truly and fully subordinated to the divine?

When a soul has ardent hope and our good God wills its charity to become more disinterested, cleansed of all faults and imperfections, and freed from every trace of egoism, He deprives it at times of all consolation, both sensible and spiritual. To put it more correctly, He does not exactly deprive it of these gifts but gives it such an ardent desire of Himself for His own sake that it suffers much at being still separated from Him, at having to wait for perfect union with Him.

⁷ Cf. Ia IIae, q. 62, a. 4.

⁸ IIa IIae, q. 27, a. 3.

⁹ Hope makes us desire God as our supreme good and last end by subordinating ourselves to Him, as we have seen; however, it does not make us formally love Him for His own sake nor cause us to desire beatitude in order to glorify God eternally. Cf. Ia IIae, q. 62, a. 4; IIa IIae, q. 27, a. 3.

¹⁰ Ps. 113: 1.

Like a banked fire, God remains in the soul's center; no spark seems to come from Him. Nevertheless faith and hope frequently are almost purified in such souls. They are like the souls in purgatory who have come to the end of their sufferings and ardently desire the vision of God. No created good can any longer offer them consolation, so strong is their desire for an infinitely greater good. More clearly than ever before the soul now sees that "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity" save to love God and to serve Him. Yet the Lord seems to withdraw Himself from the soul; and the more it desires to be united to Him, the more this separation pains and racks it.

As St. John of the Cross expresses it so well: "The very light and the loving wisdom which are to be united with the soul and transform it are the same that at the beginning purge and prepare it: even as the very fire which transforms the log of wood into itself, and makes it part of itself, is that which at the first was preparing it for that same purpose." He adds that this figure serves to explain the sufferings of the souls in purgatory: "For the fire would have no power over them, even though they came into contact with it, if they had no imperfections for which to suffer. These are the material upon which the fire of purgatory seizes; when that material is consumed, there is nought else that can burn. So here, when the imperfections are consumed, the affliction of the soul ceases and its fruition remains."¹¹ These sufferings, like personal purifications, last for a shorter time when more intense and when borne more supernaturally, with perfect abandonment.¹²

¹¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 10, 12.

¹² It is true that when a tested soul offers itself for sinners it continues to have great sufferings, even when its personal purification is only just accomplished.

It is no wonder that when the very core of a man's soul is being purged that he feels forever bereft of any good that he once possessed.¹³ At this point, people are tempted to believe God cruel. Job complains that instead of God hearing him and coming to his aid: "I cry to Thee, and Thou hearest me not: I stand up, and Thou dost not regard me. Thou art changed to be cruel toward me, and in the hardness of Thy hand Thou art against me."¹⁴ The Psalmist makes the same plaint: "Arise, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? arise, and cast us not off to the end. Why turnest Thou Thy face away? and forgettest our want and our trouble?"¹⁵ Above all, the words of the psalm uttered by Christ in His agony come back to memory at such times: "O God, my God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But with them comes the thought that in His hour of darkness our Savior offered Himself to His Father who had delivered Him up for us.

In union with Him, frequently repeating His seven last words, we too can make a great act of love for the single and pure motive that God is sovereignly lovable in Himself, infinitely more deserving of love than all the gifts that He has accorded to us or that we can hope to receive from Him. This realization marks the rising of the third star in the night of the soul; and contemplating it, a man resigns himself fully to God's will. Whatever acts of faith, of hope, and of charity he makes are in some way all grounded in an act of perfect abandonment to the divine will. Christ consecrated the sacrifice of the cross with His dying words, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

The Christian now believes with ardent faith that Christ

¹³ *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 10.

¹⁴ Job 30: 21.

¹⁵ Ps. 43: 23.

continues to offer Himself to His Father and, together with Himself, all the members of His mystical body, by the ministry of His priests.¹⁶ Knowing this, the follower of Christ unites himself with the Eucharistic sacrifice that perpetuates the substance of Christ's sacrifice on our altars. And those who suffer supernaturally some part of what our Lord endured and, mindful of the four ends of sacrifice, allow themselves to be offered to the Father by Him, have a special share in Christ's offering. Our actions have only finite worth, but when Christ Jesus offers them, they are His oblation and, because of His divine personality, their value is beyond measure. Yet, even when our Lord offers up our personal sufferings to God, they are not the matter for the Sacrifice of the Mass: we must always distinguish between the victim of infinite worth and all others. The oblation which Christ makes of Himself includes us, however, for in offering Himself, He offers us as well. By embracing us, our Lord's sacrifice becomes no more perfect in itself but radiates on us and through us; just as in creating the universe and having it reflect His goodness and hymn His glory, God becomes no greater than He was before.

At this period of the spiritual life, the time for the purification of our love of neighbor has also come. Therefore we no longer receive from him any marks of esteem or of gratitude, in spite of all the good that we would do for him. Sometimes those to whom we are most devoted cause us this apostolic suffering. Then we learn to love those dear to us purely for God's sake, that they may be saved and sanctified and may

¹⁶ "*Idem nunc offerens ministerio sacerdotum,*" as the Council of Trent says in showing that the Sacrifice of the Mass is the same in substance as the sacrifice of the cross. In some recent works on the Mass this important point of doctrine is far from receiving the emphasis which, we believe, it should receive.

glorify Him eternally, and we understand of what small moment this act of ours is in comparison to St. Peter Martyr's supplication for the man who killed him and afterward became a saint, in comparison to St. Stephen's cry for those who stoned him, and our Lord's prayer for those who crucified Him. What St. John of the Cross says of our intimate relations with God must also be affirmed of our relations with our neighbor, superiors and equals alike.

At the end of this trial, charity for God and neighbor is purified of every alloy. Like gold out of the crucible, it has lost whatever dulled and tainted it and yet it comes out more abundant than it was before. Unlike feeble acts of charity, heroic acts obtain immediately the increase of charity which they merit, and they merit according to the measure of their fervor.¹⁷ And, with sanctifying grace, all the virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost united to charity, show a like increase.¹⁸

St. John of the Cross says:

This is an enkindling of love in the spirit, where, in the midst of these dark afflictions, the soul feels itself to be keenly and acutely wounded in strong divine love. . . . And, inasmuch as this love is infused, it is passive rather than active, and thus it begets in the soul a strong passion of love. . . . The yearning and the grief of this soul in this enkindling of love are greater because it is multiplied in two ways: first, by the spiritual darkness wherein it finds itself, which afflicts it with its doubts and misgivings; and then by the love of God, which enkindles and stimulates it, and with its loving wound, causes it a wondrous fear. . . . But in the midst of these dark and loving afflictions the soul feels within itself a certain

¹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 6, ad 1um.

¹⁸ Ia IIae, q. 66, a. 2; q. 68, a. 5.

companionship and strength which bear it company and strengthen it.¹⁹

After the purification of charity, begins that "transforming" union with God which both St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross speak of, she in seventh mansions of *The Interior Castle* and he in *The Living Flame of Love*. Our Lord's words to His Father are as fully realized as they can be in this world: "That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us."²⁰ The soul reaches its perfect age and experiences the fulfillment of St. Paul's words, "But he who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit."²¹ The action of fire offers us some comparison to transforming union, for it first blackens and dries wood and then pervades and transforms it into fire itself.²² Crystal shot through with sunlight provides another parallel. As St. Thomas says, fire can transform bodies, but God alone can make souls God-like.²³

The more perfect deification possible to the soul in this life has now been achieved; it has been brought into the inner sanctuary, the intimate center where the Blessed Trinity dwells; and it receives a supernatural peace that can never, so to speak, be lost; and lives only to contemplate and love God. Under certain substantial touches, it feels God so near that He seems to be just behind a thin veil and about to be seen. By the gift of wisdom it tastes more and more of God's infinite goodness: "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet."²⁴

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 11.

²⁰ John 17: 21.

²¹ I Cor. 6: 17.

²² *Op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 10.

²³ Ia IIae, q. 112, a. 1.

²⁴ Ps. 33: 9.

And it recalls the words of the Canticle of Canticles: "For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land . . . the vines in flower yield their sweet smell."²⁵ Something like a prelude to eternal life has begun in time, yet sometimes at this juncture new trials begin.

Participation in our Lord's victimhood

Often souls in this state are led by the Holy Ghost to offer themselves as victims for sinners, in union with Christ and following His example. Before making such an offering, we should do well to make satisfaction for our own sins and become purified ourselves. But when the Holy Ghost Himself seems to incline a soul that way and it wins the approval of a wise director with the grace of state to recognize divine inspiration, should it not say: "If it is indeed Thou, Lord, inspiring this act, I have no desire to resist Thy appeal." Then just as the cross has led to perfect love, now perfect love leads back to the cross, and the soul accepts it with much greater generosity than before, somewhat as our Lord and His Blessed Mother, who needed no purification for themselves, took up the cross for our sakes. So, after some time of intimate divine union, the night of the soul begins again but in a different way. Now a partially perceptible peace reigns at the summit of the soul and holds its own even in the midst of the most terrible tempests, a dim but true image and reminder of our Lord's peace during the anguish of the cross.²⁶

²⁵ Cant. 2: 11.

²⁶ Our Lord, says a disciple of St. Thomas, could have found in the beatific vision a defense against the evils which He was enduring. But He willed that the vision which beatified His soul should touch only the contemplative heights of His in-

When souls have become united to God in this way, the sufferings that recommence thereafter are more redemptive than purifying. All at once the purification of the three theological virtues seems to begin again but it has a new character. When we offer ourselves for sinners, prayer alone fails to suffice. We must struggle with them, share their dangers and trials, feel in ourselves what they endure in losing God, and, in union with our Savior, in some way bear their sins, their unbelief, their despair, their discontent, and their anger. A soul thus put to the proof feels rejected by God, damned. Nevertheless, although grace is unfelt, it strengthens and sustains the sufferer, giving him, in the place of those for whom he suffers, a holy hatred for the sins which they will one day repent of through the grace thus won for them.

Souls called to follow this hard path go through such dark-nesses and torments that sometimes their directors have no idea where they are going and, because of their anxiety, cause them much more suffering without meaning to do so. St. Teresa speaks of the trial of having confessors who dread and suspect everything.²⁷ To go through all this means real agony, a terrible conflict with the spirit of evil, a martyrdom of the heart. But those who are faithful will find realized within themselves what is greatest in the life of the Church militant, the spouse of Christ: "Love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames. Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it."²⁸ Supernatural love for God and souls is stronger

tellec and not be diffused either over the lower part of His spiritual powers or into His sense faculties. Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q.46, a.8 and the present work, Vol. I, Part I, chap. 4.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, Sixth Mansion, chap. 1.

²⁸ Cant. 8: 6 f.

than the death of the body, for it lives on eternally; it is stronger than spiritual death and hell, for it gives crucified souls a share in our Redeemer's victory over sin and Satan.

St. Catherine of Siena, St. Rose of Lima, St. Magdalen of Pazzi, and many others were made acquainted with torment of this kind and thus came to love God and souls for God so purely that their love had no trace of egoism.²⁹ We admire the pure conjugal love of Christian widows who, with the courage of love, manage to raise their children to become living images of the father they have lost. How much more we should admire the spouses of Christ who, without consolation for years, remain faithful to Him in their life of prayer and immolation and keep on loving Him with a love as strong and as pure as it is sorrowful.

Under the special influence of the gift of understanding, progressively enlightening us about the infinite greatness of God and our own weakness, the three theological virtues are purified of every alloy. Like three stars in the night, the three pure motives of these virtues shine out more and more clearly in their essential supernaturalness, inaccessible to the natural powers of any created intellect and will. Faith, hope, and charity, and the gifts of wisdom and understanding show considerable growth and, as the Holy Ghost generally moves souls according to the degree of the virtues and gifts to be found in them, He now gives them supernatural contemplation and a proportionate degree of actual union. They are brought thus to the supreme and normal completion of the life of grace and the perfect realization of the first command-

²⁹ St. Thomas says: "As Augustine adds in the same passage, the measure of our love for God is to love Him with our whole heart, that is, to love Him as much as He can be loved." IIa IIae, q.27, a.6, ad 2um.

ment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself."³⁰

What practical conclusion should we draw from all this? When reading of the wonderful things that took place in the lives of the saints, let us not get big-headed and desire crosses that we could not carry or believe ourselves burdened with trials that exist only in our imagination; but let us carry the crosses which our Lord actually sends us—usually they are small. Let us carry them with resignation, with thankfulness, and with love. With resignation: we have to suffer. Modern progress has tried to do away with suffering but has certainly not succeeded; and to struggle against suffering only adds irritation to pain and robs us of merit. In the world there are, sad to say, many who carry a lost cross, gaining no more from it than the bad thief gained from his.

Gratitude should be joined to resignation, for the cross is a hidden and precious grace sent to us for our purification. We may not see this immediately, but when we think about some of the crosses that have come to us in the past, we realize how useful and fruitful they have been for us. Sometimes we wish for crosses other than our own, but were they given to us, we would wish to take back the one that Providence has chosen for us, since it is perfectly adapted to our strength aided by grace.

Love ought to accompany gratitude, or, if not love, at least a desire to love the cross. We should never consider the cross apart from our Savior. Let us look upon Christ crucified to be drawn to Him by sufferings that make us resemble Him. From Him will come our strength to bear them. Let us have

³⁰ Luke 10: 27.

the courage to allow Him to love and purify us and incorporate us into Himself. He desires to communicate to us something of His hidden and sorrowful life, before giving us a participation in His glorious life in heaven. We see this in the lives of saints with a special love for the cross, such as St. Benedict Joseph Labre. Shortly before his death, when in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, he seemed to have the face of Christ, so much like Him had he become through sufferings accepted with love. Blessed are those who have a deep understanding of the mystery of redemption and live by it. In them Christ's sufferings are in some way continued. The mystical body of the Savior can no more live without suffering than our eyes can function without light. The sorrowful mysteries are the way leading to the glorious mysteries of eternity, the beginning of eternal life in time.

CHAPTER X

CHARACTERISTIC SIGNS OF
THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL

If all that glitters is not gold, neither is every kind of darkness and suffering of soul a passive purification. Let us take a brief glance at the nature of those painful times of darkness that are entirely different from the night of the soul, and then afterward take up the discussion of certain purifications that are real but very difficult to judge, pointing out, finally, the true signs of the night of the soul. In this we shall follow four Thomists: Philip of the Blessed Trinity, C.D., Valgornera, Alexander Piny, and Louis Chardon. Of the three Dominicans—all of whom have made a special study of the subject—Chardon will be quoted at length so that interior souls will be led to read his book, *La Croix de Jésus*, referred to earlier and far too little known.¹

¹ Louis Chardon has been referred to so frequently in this work that some facts about him seem to be indicated as helpful.

According to Echard's *Scriptores ordinis Praedicatorum*, II, 566, Chardon was born in the Ile-de-France about 1595. Having completed his studies and desiring to retire from the world, he entered the Dominicans in 1618, became master of novices and an experienced director of souls seeking perfection. He died at the age of 56 in 1651. His principal works are: *La Croix de Jésus, où les plus belles vérités de la théologie mystique et de la grâce sanctifiante sont établies* (Paris: Antoine Berthier, 1647); *Méditations sur la passion de Jésus-Christ pour tous les jours de l'année*, (Paris: Huré, 1650); *La doctrine de Dieu enseignée à sainte Catherine de Sienna en forme de dialogue, donnée au public en notre langue* (Paris: Huré, 1648); *Les divines institutions des leçons de la perfection du ven. P. Jean Taulère, données avec éclaircissements en notre langue* (Paris: Huré, 1650); *Raccourci de l'art de*

*Sufferings of a penal rather than of a
purifying nature*

The spiritual afflictions described in the exposition of the night of the soul given by St. John of the Cross must not be confused with sufferings in some regards analogous to them but of a very different character. They ought not to be taken for morbid states, such as profound melancholia, neurasthenia, or psychasthenia—in other words, with nervous exhaustion and its reverberations on moral life. People so afflicted distress themselves over nothing and sometimes end by developing a persecution mania. This may take any one of its many different forms, including the religious, depending on the person's environment and ordinary preoccupations.

méditer pour les âmes qui commencent les pratiques de la dévotion (Paris: Huré, 1649). Not having a first edition of *La Croix de Jésus*, we have quoted from the edition "revised" by Father Bourgeois and published by Lethielleux in 1895.

Louis Chardon was a master theologian, nourished by the doctrine of St. Thomas and St. Catherine of Siena and the teaching of Tauler. He has related the high concepts of mystical theology to St. Thomas' principles on Christ's fullness of grace, His mystical body, the invisible missions of the divine persons. Some exaggerations occur in his works where he indulges in an oratorical style of development. But he frequently shows great depth as a speculative theologian and as a psychologist. He may have read St. John of the Cross, whose works had their first Spanish edition in 1618 and their first translation into French in 1621, another publication following in 1665.

Whether he knew St. John of the Cross or not, Louis Chardon has written much which through its use of doctrinal principles clarifies the teaching found in slightly different form in the writings of Tauler and of St. John of the Cross. Louis Chardon has been particularly enlightening in regard to the two effects produced in Jesus' soul by His fullness of grace: deep peace and an ardent desire for the cross as the means of our salvation. He has shown also that these two effects are reproduced in the members of Christ's mystical body. Whereas St. John of the Cross inculcates in souls a love for suffering as a purifying means to divine union, Louis Chardon draws them to love suffering by emphasizing our Lord's love for the cross. Those who have read *The Dark Night* will surely see that the pages of *La Croix de Jésus* deal with the same states and sometimes throw new light upon them relative to the development of sanctifying grace which separates us from all that is not pure in things created that it may unite us more closely to God.

Temptations against chastity and patience are certainly not enough to ensure that a soul has entered into the passive night of the senses; nor are temptations against the three theological virtues a guaranty that it is undergoing the night of the soul.

Describing the state of those who make bad use of spiritual consolations,² Father Louis Chardon aptly remarks:

Because they lack steady resoluteness, they are continually changing, desiring consolations without patience and seeking them without temperance. Such over-eagerness leads to confusion, troubles and clouds the understanding, and robs the mind of peace. Restlessness of this kind weakens the life and vigor of a man's powers, depriving them of light and strength and abandoning them to their own resources. People who have fallen into a state like this fail to recognize it. Even if it is brought to their attention in such a way that they cannot help knowing it, or at least, suspecting it, the weakness which they have already contracted keeps them from making up their minds to practice those hard exercises demanded of all who would take the kingdom of God by storm.

Souls such as these continue to make violent efforts to convince themselves that a liberal God desires to accord them nothing but a great deal of sweetness. Their lack of discretion may sometimes reach the point of weakening the body. Even if health is not lost, it is so affected that the soul cannot use the body for those operations that can be produced in this life only with its cooperation. There is a weight on the breast, the brain is fagged, and breathing shallow, the heart contracts and, whenever there is an attempt to apply themselves attentively to any consideration, they get a headache. Then the imagination plays its part by representing this sorry state of affairs as worse than it actually is.

Finding themselves so sadly off, people are likely to go seeking

² *La Croix de Jésus*, 3me entretien, chap. 12. See also chap. 14.

relief in the senses and some succeed so well in finding it that they fall from their newly and generously undertaken spiritual life into what St. Paul calls an animal way of living. So reads the story of many who have left off the pursuit of perfection to which they were called by an abundance of graces from a generous God. Doctors see the results of melancholy in bodily dispositions consequent on mental torment and conflict. Those so affected ultimately give up trying to resist the impulses that trouble them. Please God, may He give such souls the profound humility to draw nearer those of whom we are now going to speak.³

Lastly, true passive purification of the soul should also be distinguished from another state, not so much a trial sent by God's mercy to dispose the soul for divine union as a chastisement of His justice. It must be remarked in regard to this subject that there are three different kinds of crosses, the same three that were raised on Calvary: the cross of Christ, the cross of the good thief, and the cross of the bad thief. Our Lord in no way merited His; He voluntarily accepted its sufferings in our stead. His was the redemptive cross. By contrast, the bad thief fully merited his cross and besides drew no profit from it. His was a lost cross, without any purifying effect, like many others in the world. The good thief certainly merited his. It was a punishment. Yet he was able to make it purifying and reparative by uniting his contrite heart to Christ.⁴

³ In regard to a case of this kind, Huysmans wrote: "It seems that nervous disorders make cleavages in the soul and lay it open for the evil spirit to enter . . . ; in this matter medicine speaks nonsense, and theology holds its tongue." *A Rebours*, the preface written twenty years after the book and quoted by Dr. A. Hesnard, *Les psychoses et les frontières de la folie*, p. 122.

⁴ St. Thomas says somewhere that the sufferings of a good religious are as different from those of a bad religious as the cross of the good thief from the cross of the bad one.

Crosses such as the good thief's may indeed resemble the night of the soul without having all its characteristics. Sometimes, because of grave sins against the Savior which remained unconfessed and entailed a number of sacrilegious Communion as well, a repentant sinner may have a heavy debt to pay divine justice although he has already been forgiven his sins. The torments that he suffers lead him to ask whether his sins have really been forgiven or whether he is on the way to damnation. Frequent temptations against hope and charity arise, and God Himself seems cruel. In such cases, there is no question of any passive purification or proximate preparation of the soul for divine union but chiefly of expiation which, although hard, is better endured in this life while meriting than after death in purgatory, when we can no longer merit.

The different instances just examined—marked neurasthenia, anxiety neurosis, and the painful expiation for grave sins already remitted, are plainly quite different from the true night of the soul. There are, however, cases of real passive purification about which it is difficult to decide.

Obscure forms of passive purification

The topic being a delicate one, it behooves us to listen to the best authorities on the subject. Father Louis Chardon describes states of this nature when speaking of three different kinds of interior crosses: first, those that make us cowardly and scrupulous; secondly, those that arouse our lower nature to rebellion; and finally, those caused by a sort of general lassitude.

Of the crosses that stun and stupefy the will, he says:

In the course of the trials sent by God to the soul, it comes about that the will is forsaken at the same time that the intelligence is filled with knowledge, due either to its natural power of reason or to supernatural illumination. When this happens to a man, he then carries a cross far heavier than any he has ever known before. Light may flood the mind, but the will remains empty. Holy people so tried believe that they would have been better off ignorant than possessed of a sublime knowledge which yet gives them no power to love what their very nature forbids them to hate. They suffer much, feeling themselves forbidden to take hold of what they long for with a love beyond any power to express or prove. They see that the object of their love is worthy of all love, yet cannot turn to Him with all their strength. God's mercy inspires no confidence, His justice excites no fear. . . . Meditation on His mysteries leaves the affections cold.

A kind of constraint of heart results, a timid and repressed disposition of mind, a shrinking of the soul's courage. . . . Souls that rose like eagles toward the sun become scared nestlings fluttering along on the ground. They begin to be afraid of everything and see all their actions as tainted with sin. The wisest counsel succeeds in calming their fears only with great difficulty. Their minds remain cowardly, enervated, and depressed. They shun the remedy to be found in the advice of enlightened directors . . . defying them and doubting the uprightness of their intention. They come to Communion as if presenting themselves before the tribunal of some terrible judge. They have attention only for their own misery, are so conscious of it and feel themselves so evil that they think it impossible that they could be of any use to others. . . . In other words, they know that they have offended God but are not sure that they have obtained His pardon.⁵

Lack of knowledge, together with its imaginings and terrifying thoughts, causes a cross unparalleled, bowing down

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 2me entretien, chap. 13.

the heart and breaking courage. An experienced director will see, however, that the grief experienced for their faults, proves that these souls love God above all things and that, to do His will, they are ready, in spite of everything, to suffer still more.

When talking of the crosses that cause our lower nature to revolt, Louis Chardon relates that, according to Sulpicius Severus,⁶ there was once an illustrious prelate of outstanding virtue who had often with his blessing freed those troubled by the devil. One day he was dismayed to find himself incited to pride and begged God that he himself might rather become the habitation of the devil than be guilty of complacency. And the result of his prayer was soon manifest.⁷

Louis Chardon adds:

It seems that something analogous happens to some souls. Long experience of God's guidance has given them a wonderful grace of discernment. Yesterday they knew the way that they must follow to go forward without fear on the road of perfection. And today they know nothing. They have to go asking light of others to whom they could have given it in abundance before. Souls accomplished in the practice of high virtue see themselves driven to the necessity of going to learn the first elements of the spiritual life in the school of less perfect people. . . . For a long time they have been penetrated by the vanity of everything that is not God and filled with horror at inordinate desires, having reason to believe that they were forever cut off from new temptations. And now they feel themselves harried and tormented with thoughts, and desires . . . and passions that almost make them lose hope of ever again finding the favors that they once knew. If they desire to find some solace for their misery in God, they see that the avenues leading to Him are closed. And were they open, their understanding would

⁶ *Dialogue*, treatise I.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, chap. 15.

be too darkened to be aware of it and their will too slack to get up and more toward Him. . . . All the faculties under the will's direction revolt against it. The more it desires to rise toward the source of all good, the more it is held back by the deterrent weight of our lower nature, which represents to it only objects that crucify it. . . . With severity, yet full lovingly, God holds its interior acts as though in a state of suspension. It has no other support but Him. He Himself put it in this crucible where, almost without being able to act, it suffers through God, through creatures, and through itself. . . .

People so tried are often tempted to impatience. Their nature is left to its own weakness. No sensible influence of any kind comes to them from heaven, and everything conspires to cause them desolation. . . . What has become of the pure flaming love that used to purify the imperfections of their heart and the efficacious strength once manifest in their actions? They know only irksome disgust and aversion and are even tempted to turn from resignation and submission to God's adorable designs. . . . Nature revolts against the spirit with such violence that nothing else can make itself felt. The higher faculties are as if unconscious and incapable of action; and such is the sway of our evil nature that it is impossible even to distinguish for practical purposes between what is necessary and what is free, between consent and feeling.⁸

These passages make us think of the violent and prolonged temptations experienced by St. Alphonsus Liguori at the age of eighty. When reading his life, we might take this trial for the night of the senses, but it must have been a purification of a much higher order.

Louis Chardon continues: "In this state, doubts, anxieties, and disturbances arise in the soul. Are not these aversions and revolts that it experiences acts of the will, freely consented

⁸ *Ibid.*

to? The truth is that they are as far from being acts of the will as they are from being sweet communications of holy love."⁹

All the effects of violent passions make themselves felt. . . . Thoughts of denying divine Providence haunt the mind. The senses are aroused and disturbed with an intensity reminiscent of delirium. Yet the fact that all this martyrdom results from continued resistance in the contest remains unknown. . . . If it were otherwise, if the besieged gave way before these assaults, if the powers of the soul yielded their consent, all this travail, that makes us think of the dread spectacle of souls forever banished from God's sight, would come to a halt.

In resignation and silence these souls are really cleaving to all that God is pleased to decide for them. They practice patience just when their nature is most impatient; they enjoy peace in spite of anxiety and keep silence in the face of trouble, practicing indifference in the midst of turmoil, and conformity in spite of uprushes of anger. Nevertheless, because their acts of submission are tacit rather than explicit, they remain ignorant of their own state.¹⁰

God permits all this for their advancement. May they then allow this trial to go forward and be accomplished in them, having their purgatory here on earth and coming at last to free themselves of every stain and imperfection. For those who have eyes to see, the full strength of love first appears in this conflict: *Fortis est ut mors dilectio*.

Crosses caused by general helplessness: The rigorous action of love delivers others over to another form of passive purification difficult to judge. Having received great graces, these souls can no longer bring them back to mind. The under-

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 16.

standing is clouded; the will, numbed; and the devil is permitted to interpose in order to exercise their fidelity. How can they ask God's help? He is hidden. Faith sleeps so heavily that we could believe it dead. When St. Teresa was undergoing this trial it seemed to her that she was like a ball in the hands of her enemy. She wrote of it: "The mind feels as if it never had thought of God nor ever will be able to do so. When men speak of Him, they seem to be talking of some person heard of long ago."¹¹

Elsewhere she says:

Faith is then as dead, and asleep, like all the other virtues; not lost, however,—for the soul truly believes all that the Church holds; but its profession of the faith is hardly more than an outward profession of the mouth. And, on the other hand, temptations seem to press it down, and make it dull, so that its knowledge of God becomes to it as that of something which it hears of far away. . . . Vocal prayer or solitude is only a greater affliction. . . . To converse with any one is worse, for the devil then sends so offensive a spirit of bad temper, that I think I could eat people up; nor can I help myself. I feel that I do something when I keep myself under control; or rather our Lord does so, when He holds back with His hand any one in this state from saying or doing something that may be hurtful to his neighbours and offensive to God.

Then, as to going to our confessor, that is of no use; for there certainly results—and very often has it happened to me—what I shall now describe. Though my confessors, with whom I had to do then, and have to do still, are so holy, they spoke to me and reproved me with such harshness, that they were astonished at it afterwards when I told them of it. They said that they could not help themselves; for, though they had resolved not to use such language, and though they had pitied me also very much,—yea,

¹¹ *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, chap. 1.

even had scruples on the subject, because of my grievous trials of soul and body,—and were, moreover, determined to console me, they could not refrain. They did not use unbecoming words—I mean, words offensive to God; yet their words were the most offensive that could be borne with in confession. They must have aimed at mortifying me. At other times, I used to delight in this, and was prepared to bear it; but it was then a torment altogether.¹²

Louis Chardon has the same thing to say and adds something further in regard to directors:

Sometimes eminent people, men of probity and of mild and indulgent character, become brusque, rough, and forbiddingly severe with these poor afflicted souls. They reproach them with their sufferings, accuse them of impatience, and lay all their difficulties at the door of a lack of resignation. Or they begin to have doubts and misgivings about the state of their souls, becoming persuaded that they are deceived by the devil and are likely to impose on their acquaintances as well. Often directors have no patience to listen to their tales of woe . . . and sometimes those best versed in spiritual things are the ones to desert them.¹³

These pages of Chardon, at times verified to the letter, are all worth reading.

To see such cases with some clarity, a director must either know the person for some time, or have some special grace of state akin to discernment of spirits. If he perseveres in prayer and patience, he will be enlightened and come to recognize in this state of affliction genuine love for God. These souls would indeed fear to lie by saying that they love the Lord, but at bottom they are His familiars. We recognize this chiefly in the fact that although they no longer desire the

¹² *Life*, chap. 30.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, 2me entretien, chap. 17.

cross, they do not wish it to be taken from them. And although their faith and hope seem dead, in the depth of their souls direct but imperceptible acts of these virtues take place and are seen by God, by Christ, and His Blessed Mother, and by all the angels and saints in heaven. And that suffices.

Sometimes people offer to suffer in order to obtain the grace of conversion, or at least of a good death, for some unhappy and fallen soul, and God seems to accept their offering, judging by the crosses that come to them and increase from day to day. After having frequently renewed their act of oblation, they reach a point where they no longer feel ready to do so, being too overcome and spent and tormented with frightful doubts about the mystery of predestination and the thought of the damned. Their faith seems to have gone to sleep. Then their director may sometimes suggest to them: "Perhaps you could say to our Lord: 'My God, if Thou didst not inspire my act of oblation, I do not renew it. It no longer holds.'" And not infrequently, after a moment of reflection and of prayer, these poor victims will answer: "I really cannot say it. This thing is stronger than I. I feel that if I were to renounce my oblation I would destroy what is best in my life."

In the depths of these souls a little breath of hope still stirs, making them cling to reparation. This little breath is a heroic act of confidence in God in the midst of the sorrowful Passion continued in some way within them and of necessity so continued in some members of Christ's mystical body until the end of time. In a sense, Jesus Christ is in agony until the end of the world. It was at the moment when He suffered most that the disciples, with the exception of John, deserted Him, and so it is that sometimes when the saints are most

configured to the suffering Christ they too are forsaken. The cross is a mystery and, in its essential supernaturalness, lies infinitely beyond the grasp of the most gifted minds. "I have not loved you in jest," our Lord said to Blessed Angela of Foligno. There are supernatural depths of love into which only the saints can look.

Therefore we need not be surprised that there are forms of real passive purification most difficult to judge; such indeed are the greatest and deepest passive purifications, which are sometimes accompanied by sicknesses that exhaust the nervous system.¹⁴ But to finish the subject let us come to the most evident signs.

*Three characteristic signs
of the passive purification of the soul*

The characteristic signs of the passive purification of the soul are rarely as clear in concrete reality as they are in the abstract treatises that enumerate them. However, an attentive examination quite often does enable us to recognize them when they occur.

The distinctive signs of true passive purification of the soul are found in the effects produced by it; as our Lord has said, "By the fruit the tree is known."¹⁵ St. Thomas remarks that some effects reveal their cause wholly, not only its existence but also its nature; these belong to the same species as their causes. Only one plant produces the iris, and the fig tree alone gives figs. Other effects not having a specific likeness to their cause reveal only its existence but not its nature. The effects of the First Cause lack the capacity to

¹⁴ Cf. *Life*, chap. 30.

¹⁵ Matt. 12: 33.

make known His inner nature, although some of them, such as existence, life, and intellect, for instance, can only come from a First Being, from the Author of life and the First Intellect. Other effects again manifest neither the nature nor the existence of the cause which produces them, for they could be produced by several causes. For example, physical depression can come either from a state of health due to atmospheric conditions like the sirocco or from moral causes such as overwhelming sadness.

Among the signs of the night of the soul enumerated in the description given by St. John of the Cross and referred to earlier, some which are characteristic of it could come from no other source. Others, however, reveal it only imperfectly; do not make its nature known, or even fail to give us positive assurance of its existence, for they could spring from other causes. We wish therefore to enumerate the distinctive marks of these trials, to total those which, when taken together, show clearly that a soul is passing through the passive purification of the soul, sent by God's mercy to prepare it for divine union.

Remembering that purgation of the spirit is accomplished chiefly by the gift of understanding, which reveals to us much more clearly than we ever knew before our own miseries and God's infinite greatness, we should note first of all that this state can be either one of pure and simple purification disposing the soul for divine union, or at one and the same time both a purification and a punishment due to sin. In the latter case, it may take on many shades of difference, from being more a testing than a chastisement, to being more a punishment than a purification immediately ordered to divine union. Sometimes, toward the end of life, people who have

not yet reached union properly speaking enter into this state and seem to have their purgatory, in part at least, before death. Finally, as has already been brought out, there are, on a much higher level, sufferings more redemptive than purifying, by which some souls are associated in Christ's sorrowful life for the salvation of sinners. According to Philip of the Blessed Trinity,¹⁶ three characteristic signs of the true night of the soul proclaim it as a pure and simple purification or at least as much more a testing preparatory to divine union than a chastisement.

The first of these signs consists in this: On one hand the soul has no consciousness of having recently committed any materially grave sin, and on the other hand it has passed from a state of consolation or spiritual sweetness into great aridity. There it meets with nothing but darkness and affliction and finds itself buried in a sort of purgatory or even in a kind of hell owing to violent temptations against the highest virtues.

If this sign reveals nothing to the tormented soul itself, it serves to inform an enlightened and experienced director, much needed by souls at such times. He should offer encouragement, telling the soul that this trial is sent by divine mercy to lead it to perfect abandonment and a more intimate union with God. When, in fact, God leads souls as far as to make a resolution to serve Him on all occasions, He does not leave them for long at rest. He shows a sort of jealousy toward them and will not suffer that their affection be attached to anything not Himself. He takes away from them every-

¹⁶ His text is conscientiously reproduced word for word by Vallgornera, who has transcribed besides many pages from John of St. Thomas on the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

thing that could distract them from Him, even divine consolations, and in this sense, we can say, with Chardon, that God withdraws His gifts from us so that we may have the Giver Himself.¹⁷

The second sign is a long-term avoidance of all fully deliberate sin, whether mortal or venial, together with disinterest in exterior things, an almost continual consciousness of the soul's own miseries, and an ardent desire for perfection. This sign must accompany the preceding, because it confirms the fact that a person has not recently committed any serious sin that would rob it of the state of grace and God's friendship. As St. Thomas shows, anyone deprived of divine grace and charity cannot long avoid deliberate sin and is not slow in betraying an attachment for creatures and a propensity for external things.¹⁸ Chardon says: "The faithful soul soon shows what love possesses it and makes it act, how different is its love from that which is grounded in nature. . . . In the greatest tribulations hearts filled with disinterested charity do not lose the constancy and sweetness they acquired in the time of sensible communications. Their intention then becomes upright, pure, and perfect. . . . They order all things to God and do all things for Him. . . . In this state, their intention not only grows established in absolute uprightness but becomes divine or deiform, transformed in God."¹⁹ The same doctrine was developed at length in the seventeenth century, thirty-six years after Chardon, by Father Alexander Piny, O.P.²⁰

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, 3me entretien, chap. 16.

¹⁸ Ia IIae, q. 109, a. 8, 9, 10.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, chap. 18.

²⁰ Cf. *La plus parfaite des voies intérieures ou la voie d'abandon* (1863), chaps. 7, 9, 15, 19.

The third sign is an almost continual contemplation of the divine goodness despite the soul's extreme aridity. This contemplation is general and obscure and, although it resists, it does not exclude, temptations against faith. At the same time the soul has an ardent but unfeeling love of God and for this reason suffers much at the sight of sin. The measure of its suffering is the measure of its love—for God first of all, whom sin offends, for our Lord, whom sin has crucified, and for souls, whom sin sends to death. This third sign, united to and confirming those preceding it, is proof positive to an enlightened director of the true night of the soul. This state certainly can be present, however, without giving such manifest signs of its existence.

Louis Chardon says:

The soul becomes divine or deiform, no longer having any life but God's, or any knowledge or any love but His. . . . A pure supernatural sight is given to it. It beholds the emptiness of all things sensible and everything that can harm the soul. It sees that God is all, and that consequently everything else is nothing. . . . It has come to the summit of contemplation, reached not without cost. . . . The soul is reduced to perfect poverty of spirit, to a state of pure dependence, of simple capacity, in which nothing human is to be found . . . and it lives in the darkness wherein the uncreated light dwells and is there more plainly seen. . . . Man draws nearer the inaccessible perfections of God when he is abased than when he is exalted and full of delights. When in this state he is unacquainted with any revelations whatsoever, undisturbed by transports or ecstasies, visions or apparitions. In a light unknown to itself, the soul sees that any other means can only represent God less perfectly than this state of nakedness and privation. Through it we are drawn to God in perfect purity.²¹

²¹ *Op. cit.*, chap. 20.

These facts have led mystics to believe that at such times the understanding produces no vital act and operates without images—and without ideas—although these two are necessary conditions for the knowledge of wayfarers. Because a suspension of the knowledge acquired by way of affirmation takes place in the understanding and it apprehends by way of negation and in a manner above any sensory mode of knowledge or any positive concept; and because the divine light, without which knowledge of this kind would be impossible, is communicated in excess, . . . the understanding therefore remains submerged in the depths of a wise obscurity and hidden in the secrecy of a knowing ignorance.²²

The attention of all the powers is plunged into the abyss of divine love.

It is sometimes said that St. Thomas nowhere speaks of such a state. Louis Chardon cites to the contrary St. Thomas' commentary on the following words of Dionysius: "There is a perfect knowledge of God, obtained in ignorance and in virtue of an incomprehensible union; this takes place when the soul, leaving all things and forgetting itself, is united to the splendors of divine glory and enlightened by the unfathomable divine wisdom."²³ St. Thomas writes in his commentary: "We know God in ignorance, by a certain supernatural union, in which the mind is enlightened by the deep, and to us impenetrable, divine wisdom."²⁴ In other places the Angelic Doctor makes allusion to negative knowledge and transluminous darkness, about which the Scriptures have so often spoken.²⁵ To read what he has to say on the following words of St. Paul will prove particularly help-

²² *Ibid.*, chap. 21.

²³ Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, chap. 7, lect. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, lect. 4.

²⁵ *Ila Ilae*, q. 180, a. 5, ad 2um.

ful: "the Blessed and only Mighty . . . who . . . inhabiteth light inaccessible."²⁶

Often the three characteristic signs of the night of the soul are not so plainly evident. The time of spiritual testing can be complicated by sickness and even by neurasthenia. Sometimes directors find it difficult to distinguish between sufferings not of a purifying character and others more penal than purifying. They may also find it hard to tell the latter from others of a higher type, more redemptive than purifying, and likely to be found in souls dedicated to a life of reparation. Because of these difficulties, when those who have care of souls search for signs of true love for God, it is important for them not to judge any case by isolated acts or over a short period of time but in relation to the whole of life.

Finally, it should be noted that, between the night of the senses and the night of the soul, various trials and afflictions of a transitory character occur. The author of *The Imitation* often speaks of them, and St. John of the Cross remarks:

For, having passed through a period, or periods, or days of this night and tempest, the soul soon returns to its wonted serenity; and after this manner God purges certain souls which think not to rise to so high a degree of love as do others, bringing them at times, and for short periods, into this night of contemplation and purgation of the spirit, causing night to come upon them and then dawn, and this frequently, so that the words of David may be fulfilled, that He send His crystal—that is, His contemplation—like the morsels; although these morsels of dark contemplation are never as intense as is that terrible night of contemplation . . . into which,

²⁶ *In Ep. I ad Tim.*, 6: 16; likewise Ia IIae, q. 112, a. 5, ad 3um.

of set purpose, God brings the soul that He may lead it to divine union.²⁷

Sixty years later, Louis Chardon expounds the same doctrine; and after that we find it again in Alexander Piny's beautiful pages on abandonment to God's will. For all of them, this dark period means in reality an entrance into light, when the Lord harkens to the petition we make so often when reciting the psalms: "Give me understanding, and I will search Thy law."²⁸ "Give me understanding, and I will learn Thy commandments."²⁹ "Give me understanding, and I shall live."³⁰ Longings like St. Paul's for the Colossians are then realized: "Therefore we . . . cease not to pray for you, and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding: That you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing,"³¹ "being instructed in charity, and unto all riches of fullness of understanding, unto the knowledge of the mystery of God the Father and of Christ Jesus: in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."³²

²⁷ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 1.

²⁸ Ps. 118: 34.

²⁹ Ps. 118: 73.

³⁰ Ps. 118: 144.

³¹ Col. 1: 9.

³² Col. 2: 2.

PART III

THE LIFE OF UNION THROUGH JESUS AND MARY

CHAPTER XI

THE ABIDING OF THE BLESSED TRINITY IN PURIFIED SOULS AND TRANSFORMING UNION

By way of synthesis, we should now like to show how perfect union with God, prepared for by the passive purifications of the senses and spirit, is the normal result of the mysterious indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the just. To accomplish this we shall first recall to mind the mystery as understood by St. Thomas and his best commentators; then we shall speak of St. John of the Cross as a great mystical doctor with an exceptional insight into the results which are achieved by our giving ourselves without any reservation to the true interior life.

Following the great spiritual authors who preceded him and stating their doctrine exactly, St. John of the Cross shows, from the prologue of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* up to the last pages of *The Spiritual Canticle*, that the Christian who gives himself generously to the interior life and does not hesitate to follow the royal road of the cross, should reach so close a union with the indwelling Trinity that it merits the name of transforming union. He sees the latter, coming as it does after the passive purification of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as the supreme and therefore the rare, although the normal, development of the spiritual life.

*The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity:
source and end of the spiritual life*

Holy Scripture often speaks of the general presence of God in all things, which He conserves in existence but tells us just as positively—as was noted earlier¹—of the special presence of the Blessed Trinity in the just. Christ says: “If anyone love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.”² Evidently He is not talking here of the general presence of God in everything which He conserves in existence, but of His presence in the just who love Him above all things and keep His word. He accords to them not only the created gift of grace but, as our Lord says, “My Father and I will come to him and will make Our abode with him.”

Three verses later, He tells us in the same chapter of St. John’s Gospel: “But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.” A little earlier,³ He had already said: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever.” St. John writes the same thought in his first epistle: “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us. . . . God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.”⁴ The same doctrine is frequently affirmed by St. Paul, for example, in the Epistle

¹ Vol. I, Part I, chap. 3.

² John 14: 23.

³ John 14: 15 f.

⁴ I John 4: 12, 16.

to the Romans: “And hope confoundeth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.”⁵ “Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”⁶ “Or know you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God; and you are not your own?”⁷

Earlier we saw how theology gives some understanding of this mystery.⁸ After the discussion of the passive purifications, the meaning and implication of the mystery should be more within our reach, and we may also gain some insight into why the divine indwelling normally results in transforming union.

Theology first shows what this special presence is in the just who have reached the perfect and definitive development of the life of grace, that is, the blessed in heaven. According to divine revelation, it is certain that every soul in heaven is like a living, spiritual tabernacle. In each the triune God really dwells, is known as He knows Himself, and is loved and glorified eternally. Consummated grace, a participation in the divine nature, acts as the principle from which the light of glory proceeds. Because of it the blessed see the divine essence face to face, better than we see people with whom we converse. They are external to us whereas the beatified behold Him who sustains their natural and divine life in the depths of their own souls.

The life of grace and of charity in this world is basically the same as that in heaven: “If thou didst know the gift of

⁵ Rom. 5: 5.

⁶ I Cor. 3: 16.

⁷ I Cor. 6: 19.

⁸ Vol. I, Part I, chap. 3.

God," Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "and who He is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water . . . a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting."⁹ The life of grace is life eternal begun; for sanctifying grace, when definitively developed, consummated, and made inamissable, will be called glory, and will become the radical principle of the beatific vision. As for the charity that we bear within our hearts, it is to last for all eternity. There are indeed two essential differences between a Christian's life on earth and in heaven: in this life we attain to God only in the obscurity of faith and we also run the risk of losing Him; in heaven we shall take hold of Him in the clearness of vision with no fear or possibility of ever losing Him. In spite of these two differences, grace and glory are basically the same life, grace being the seed of glory. We see parallels in nature: basically the same life sleeps in the acorn and thrusts upward later in the vigorous oak; and the same life of reason slumbers in the infant and makes itself actively evident in the grown man.

If, therefore, the Blessed Trinity is present and seen unveiled in the souls of the blessed, it should surely be plain to us that the triune God dwells in the souls of the just here on earth. St. Paul's words glow with light from on high when he says: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."¹⁰ And so we gain a better understanding of what our Lord means and implies in the words: "If anyone love Me . . . We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him."

⁹ John 4: 10, 14.

¹⁰ Rom. 5: 5.

Theology gives us a more exact knowledge of the nature of this mysterious presence. It is not simply the presence of God through some representation of Him within us. A philosopher not in the state of grace can speculate about God and His attributes, and, according to revelation, the Blessed Trinity dwells not within him. Furthermore, a Christian in the state of mortal sin preserves infused faith and hope, thinks about God supernaturally, and even makes some inefficacious acts of love for God; yet, according to Scripture, the Blessed Trinity dwells not within him. He knows the Blessed Trinity as a distant object imperfectly represented but not really present objectively within him. God is within him only as his conserving cause.

Every just soul possesses the special presence of God, a real, objective, and affective presence of the Author of grace. God is within the just man not as some distant object might be represented and loved but as one really present, one known as we know things by experimental knowledge, as St. Thomas puts it.¹¹

God is really present in beings inferior to us not as an object of knowledge and of love but only as their conserving cause. For the Christian in the state of mortal sin, He is, so to say, like a distant object of faith and of hope. In the just he dwells really as an object present to them, and capable of being known quasi-experimentally, of being loved and imperfectly possessed, sometimes making Himself felt there as the very life of their life.¹²

St. Thomas and many other doctors of the Church have thus understood this consoling point of revealed doctrine.

¹¹ Cf. Ia, dist. 14, q. 2, ad 3um; *ibid.*, ad 2um.

¹² Ia, q. 43, a. 3.

The three divine persons are really and substantially within us as the conserving cause of our natural and supernatural life; and they dwell there besides as the object of loving, quasi-experimental knowledge, most mysterious but very real, and attested to not only by great theologians but by revelation itself.

St. Paul speaks of it to the Romans: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God."¹³ In commenting on this Epistle, St. Thomas says that the Holy Ghost gives us this testimony through the supernatural and filial love which He produces in us and which we know experimentally, although we may find it difficult to distinguish between it and a more or less sentimental natural impulse of love sometimes resembling it.

Our Lord Himself has said: "The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him; but you shall know Him; because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you."¹⁴ And St. John also tells his disciples, "His unction teacheth you of all things."¹⁵ Lastly, we read in the Apocalypse: "To him that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna, a spiritual nourishment and . . . a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it."¹⁶

Scripture plainly speaks in these texts of a quasi-experimental knowledge of God present within us. Such knowl-

¹³ Rom. 8: 15.

¹⁴ John 14: 17.

¹⁵ I John 2: 27.

¹⁶ Apoc. 2: 17.

edge alone, according to St. Thomas, can offer an explanation of how God, already present in all things as their conserving cause, becomes really present in a new and special manner in the just as a knowable, known, and loved object. Sanctifying grace, charity, and the gift of wisdom make us capable of possessing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and, in the darkness of faith, taking a holy joy in Their presence before seeing Them face to face in eternity.¹⁷

According to revelation it must be so. If in fact the Holy Ghost has been given to us, we have received Him, and in a sense we possess Him and can revel with holy delight in His presence. Likewise the Father and the Son have come to us, with grace and charity, to make their abode. So divine revelation itself speaks and we ought now to have a better grasp of its sense and import.

If, by an impossible assumption, God were not already present in a just man as the conserving cause of his natural being, He would become really present in him as the productive and conserving cause of grace and of charity, and resultantly as an object of quasi-experimental knowledge and of the supernatural love of friendship.¹⁸

The loving and quasi-experimental knowledge of God proceeds, St. Thomas says, from the gift of wisdom, the highest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which makes us judge everything experimentally in relation to God, the author of salvation and our last end. Both theological wisdom and the gift of wisdom judge all things in relation to God. But theological wisdom is acquired by study and makes its judgments

¹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa*, Ia, q. 43, a. 3, ad rum.

¹⁸ Earlier in the present work (Vol. I, Part I, chap. 3) we have shown how St. Thomas' doctrine is superior to Vasquez's opinion and to the entirely contrary position of Suarez.

according to reasoning founded on revelation; the gift of wisdom, on the other hand, makes us judge divine things by a certain connaturality, a sort of supernatural sympathy with them founded on charity.¹⁹ This takes place by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, who uses this sympathy aroused by Him to make Himself felt within us.²⁰ Our interior Master makes us in some way taste the mysteries of salvation, showing us how much they conform, in spite of their obscurity, with our highest aspirations. He even gives us some foresight that just what seems most obscure about them is most divine, the darkness shrouding them coming not from their incoherence or absurdity but from the failure of our weak eyes looking upon so brilliant a light. Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, a special sympathy is established between this transluminous obscurity and charity, an actual and profound sympathy that becomes the principle of a lived and living knowledge far superior to reasoning. We can thus in some manner taste the mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity when it becomes apparent that it fully conforms to the aspirations of charity awakened in us by God Himself.

However mysterious this knowledge may be, we find analogies to it in the natural order. A pure heart, St. Thomas says, knows as if by instinct what is pure without being taught. A loving son needs no psychological studies to teach him what his mother's ways reveal to him of her heart; and she herself, through her deep sympathy with him and more truly than reasoning could discover to her, knows the heart of her son.

¹⁹ IIa IIae, q. 45, a. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 1.

John of St. Thomas brings out another, and striking, analogy. In the natural order, our spiritual soul, without seeing itself as it will see it when separated from the body, at present knows itself experimentally in the acts of which it is the principle, the operations of intellect and will.²¹ It requires no reasoning to do this.²² Thus, in a sense, but in a mysterious manner, the Holy Ghost gives to the just, inspires in the just, a kind of experimental knowledge of God through the supernatural acts of trust and filial love, of which He is the principle. Such knowledge pertains to the gift of wisdom and is far superior to reasoning. God, the author of grace and of salvation, thus becomes more intimate to us than we are to ourselves, inspiring within us profound acts that we ourselves could not produce, making Himself felt in some way within us as the life of our life.²³

²¹ Cf. John of St. Thomas, *in Iam*, q. 43, a. 3; also Gardeil, O.P., *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique*, II, 172-79. We must not forget, however, that for St. Thomas the separated soul and the angel do not know themselves experimentally without forming an inner word of themselves, for the separated soul and the angel are in themselves intelligible in act but not actually known of themselves. God alone is pure act in the order of intelligibility and of being. Cf. *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chap. 11. Moreover, in saying this interior word, the soul images the Blessed Trinity: *Summa*, Ia, q. 93, a. 7, 8. We regret not finding this point of doctrine sufficiently brought out in Father Gardeil's excellent book from which we have just quoted; in it he has plumbed the depths of so many other aspects of St. Thomas' doctrine.

²² Likewise our intellect without reasoning apprehends or grasps obscurely the substantial and intelligible being of sensible things as soon as our sense of sight has seized their color or our sense of touch has felt their pressure. This is why Aristotle says that the substance of such things, which is not in itself sensible, is *sensible per accidens*, accidentally so, for it is immediately grasped by our intellect, without any reasoning, when presented with sensible things. Thus when I see the color of a living face, my intellect perceives its life immediately. Cf. St. Thomas' *De anima*, Bk. II, lect. 13. Consciousness itself is enough to enable us to perceive of any individual act of our own intellect and will that it is ours; we have no need of reasoning to recognize it as an act of our soul, our person. "*Homo percipit se intelligere.*" *Summa*, Ia, q. 87, a. 1.

²³ In scholastic terms we would put it this way: *Actus amoris filialis est simul id quod cognoscitur et id quo cognoscitur absque discursu Deus habitans et vivificans.*

Let us remember that, in regard to this subject, St. Thomas speaks of a knowledge not proper but rather quasi-experimental. Why? Because it is experimental in a sense, having to do with an object not distant but actually present and attaining to it without reasoning. However, it remains only quasi-experimental, as we have said earlier:²⁴ first, because it apprehends God not in an absolutely immediate way, as occurs in the beatific vision, but in the act of filial love which He produces within us; and secondly, because we cannot distinguish with complete certitude between supernatural acts of love and the natural impulses of the heart that resemble them; moreover, without a special revelation we cannot be absolutely certain of being in the state of grace.²⁵

Here we have the teaching of theology, and in particular of St. Thomas, on the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. The three divine persons abide with us permanently. Our union with Them endures as long as the state of grace lasts. Often, for example during sleep, it resembles the theological virtues when unexercised, being only habitual, a disposition or habit. At other times, on the contrary, it becomes actual through the exercise of the theological virtues and the gifts accompanying them.

*Divine union and the higher laws
of the order of grace*

The great mystical doctors, St. John of the Cross particularly, have built their works on the dogma of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. The merit of the author of *The Dark Night* consists in showing clearly how actual initial union,

²⁴ Cf. Vol. I, Part I, chap. 3.

²⁵ Cf. Ia IIae, q. 112, a. 5.

experienced at times by the just, ought normally to become more intimate, profound, frequent, and almost continual in the true unitive way. The unitive way forms the summit of the interior life in this world, a summit too rarely attained but none the less normal and entered by the saints, after the passive purification of the soul, as the ordinary prelude to eternal life. St. John of the Cross states this truth at the beginning of his works and reaffirms it at the end.²⁶

Let us look back for a moment over the way to be traveled. The journey described by the saint consists in an ascent toward the summit of perfection. The just man keeps climbing upward toward the peace of divine union by struggling generously against whatever he finds inordinate and disorderly within him.

From the start, the Author of grace dwells in the center of his soul, as in an inner sanctuary; but the soul remains too occupied with outside things and fails to penetrate into its own depths, which remain as yet hidden to it. From time to time the Holy Ghost breathes into it some thought or impulse of heart, speaking softly in the low tones of friend to friend, and often His voice remains unheard because of a tumult of passions, too natural affections, wounded susceptibilities, and the secret pursuits of pride. To hear the voice of the Holy Ghost, we must keep an interior silence and must merit having His inspirations become less latent, more manifest, luminous, frequent, and urgent.

Exterior mortification of body and senses little by little silences inordinate and violent passions, and a beginning is made on the narrow and ascending path of abnegation. As St. Luke tells us, "And He said to all: If any man will come

²⁶ Cf. *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 4.

after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." ²⁷ *The Imitation of Christ* frequently speaks of the royal road of the cross, presenting it to us rightly as nothing extraordinary in itself, like prophetic visions and miracles, but the way that all of us should follow to reach heaven, especially if we would arrive there without passing through purgatory. Yet how few of us actually follow it!

To encourage us on a way so difficult, our Lord accords us sensible graces that make it easier for us to advance, but after a time we run the risk of becoming attached to these as an end in themselves, although they are but means. Lest, then, sensible consolations should become an obstacle to our progress, our Lord takes them away from us, He weans us from them, and makes us feel the emptiness of everything created: honor, position, and too human friendships. We begin to see as if experimentally the truth of the words of Scripture: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity"—except to love and serve God. Infused contemplation has now begun.

At the same time the Lord allows us to be tempted against chastity and patience, virtues grounded in the sensuous appetency; and, as a consequence, we are obliged to react energetically and so strengthen the virtues greatly. Little by little the sense appetite is purified, subjected to the soul, and becomes less and less an obstacle to divine union. But the soul itself requires purification: it understands the letter of revealed mysteries but must grasp and live by their spirit. It halts at symbols and figures, or again at its own fabrications, reasonings, and too human, limited, and material interpretations of the divine word. It must go farther into the

²⁷ Luke 9: 23.

depth of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist, grace, and the Blessed Trinity; it must live by them for they must be to the soul the sort of nourishment that bread is to the body.

This necessitates purification of the soul. St. John of the Cross tells us that the infused light of the gift of understanding effects such a purgation, leading us to the heart of the mysteries of salvation, helping us to find the spirit beneath the letter and the wonderful meaning of the redemptive Incarnation, and with it, a better discernment of infinite mercy and infinite justice. The soul comes to know as if experimentally the boundless worth of the sacrifice of the cross and of the Mass, the value of the hidden life and the crosses sent to us by God, the abysmal misery of being lost and, by contrast, the great happiness of returning to God.

The mysteries of faith, in particular the impenetrable mystery of predestination, appear in all their sublimity, and therefore in all their obscurity. Yet the soul in some way ascertains that the obscurity arises not from the unintelligibility of the mystery but from light so strong as to dazzle us. Often temptations against faith also arise and begin their questioning: Is it possible that God loved the world enough to give His own Son for it? If He really did, could the world be so uncomprehending? Is it possible that after this life there exists an eternity of happiness or of irreparable loss?

In the face of our own misery, temptations against hope also arise, temptations of such a character that we must hope on against all hope. In this hard travailing the virtues of faith and of hope sometimes increase tenfold. We believe more and more for the pure and simple motive that God has

revealed mysteries inaccessible to reason. We hope more and more, unsustained by any human support, with unmixed hope in God's help alone.

Something similar takes place in purified charity: we come to love God for Himself alone, and not for the sensible or spiritual consolations that may come to us from Him; we keep on loving Him as generously in times of dryness as we do in times of joy; and in the same way we have charity toward our neighbor when he shows us no gratitude, loving him for the pure motive that God loves him, and whatever about him pleases God should please us too. We really acquire some understanding of Christ's words: "Love one another, as I have loved you. . . . By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."²⁸

The command to love God and neighbor in God is thus truly fulfilled and the perfection of charity is reached. The soul enters into its own center, the inner sanctuary, where, after baptism, the Blessed Trinity abides, as long as we remain in the state of grace. A deep and almost continual actual union with God succeeds what was heretofore simple habitual union.

After this brief summary of matter covered previously, we are now in a better position to answer the important question posed earlier: In the grievous passive purifications is there a law higher than the order of grace at work? It has been sometimes asserted that the passive purifications do not conform to a universal law, but are peculiar only to some individuals, as a result of certain circumstances, like living a cloistered life, for example, or having a predominantly sensitive temperament.

²⁸ John 13: 34.

St. John of the Cross together, we think, with the great masters of the spiritual life, comes to another conclusion. Of course, as has already been conceded, these trials do not always have the acute character described by Tauler or St. John of the Cross. These masters show them to us in the depths reached by contemplative souls called to great heights, and in a number of cases, given to a life of reparation. Certainly in people dedicated to the apostolate, these interior crosses, even if they exist, stand out less strikingly, for they are mixed with the difficulties of the apostolic life. However, in one way or another, must not all pass through the purifying crucible, where together with humility and patience, fraternal charity shows much growth and points to great love of God?

We agree that this experience constitutes no general law in the sense that no union with God can be achieved without it. In fact, union with God begins with the passive purification of the senses, well in advance of the purification of the soul, although at that time it has a very imperfect character. However, we hold that not only predominantly sensitive temperaments need purgation of soul but, because it is a question of the spirit, others as well. Those who wish to reason out everything, who stop at the letter of supernatural mysteries and fail to enter deeply into their spirit, especially in the case of the mystery of the Cross, obviously have just as real a need for spiritual purification.

Therefore the question is whether Christians must pass through the passive purification of the soul not to arrive at the lower degrees of the unitive life but to reach transforming union, the true, high, and therefore rare, but normal prelude to the beatific vision. The law here is not universal in the sense of being common, of being frequently found

in the concrete; it is universal in the sense of being a higher law, relating to a rarely attained but normal summit. We see the normality of this height in the lives of the only really normal people—God's saints.

To arrive at such a summit before death a purification analogous to purgatory would seem necessary. St. Thomas has not treated *ex professo* either the growth or the full development of the theological virtues and the gifts in the way he has dealt with their nature and properties. However, what he says of the love of enemies, the degrees of humility, and the tribulations of the saints in his commentaries on Job, Isaias, Jeremias, the Psalms, and the Epistles of St. Paul, together with what he teaches concerning the great sufferings of purgatory,²⁹ and what we know of his own deep interior life, show that he was not far from what St. Catherine of Siena,³⁰ Tauler, and St. John of the Cross have expressly told us on the matter.

*Transforming union as described by
St. John of the Cross*

St. John of the Cross describes transforming union as a state of spiritual perfection, the full flowering of the grace of the virtues and of the gifts.³¹ He says that perfect spiritual life consists in the possession of God through the union of

²⁹ IV, d. 21, q. 1.

³⁰ Cf. *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, tr. A. Thorold (Westminster, Md.: Newman Bookshop, 1944), pp. 38 f.: "I have already told thee that, by the increase of love, grows grief and pain, wherefore he that grows in love grows in grief. . . . Consider that the love of divine charity is so closely joined in the soul with perfect patience, that neither can leave the soul without the other. Patience cannot be proved in any other way than by suffering, and patience is united with love."

³¹ Cf. Père Gabriel de Sainte-Madeleine, C.D., "L'union transformante selon saint Jean de la Croix," *Vie Spirituelle*, March, 1927, pp. 87 ff.

love,³² and that transforming union is the perfect stage of the spiritual life.³³

In *The Spiritual Canticle*, speaking of the "inner cellars," he writes:

And we may say that there are seven of these degrees or cellars of love, all of which the soul comes to possess when she possesses in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the manner wherein she is able to receive them. . . . It must be known that many souls attain to the first cellars and enter therein, each according to the perfection of love which he possesses, but few in this life attain to this last and innermost perfection, for in this there comes to pass that perfect union with God which they call the Spiritual Marriage.³⁴

When the soul possesses the full perfection of the gift of wisdom, the highest of the seven gifts received at baptism together with sanctifying grace, it has arrived at the inner sanctuary wherein the Blessed Trinity abides, and union with God no longer remains habitual but becomes actual and in some way transforming. The soul is deified by receiving a perfect participation in the divine nature.

The reason for this is given by St. John of the Cross in a principle stated in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. He says that the more purified and detached the soul becomes in living and perfect faith, the more it possesses infused charity, and the more charity it has, the more the Holy Ghost enlightens it and pours out upon it His gifts, in such a way that charity

³² *The Living Flame*, st. 2, especially the edition with notes by Father Gerardo, 1912, II, 426; Eng. tr. Peers, III, 55, *Complete Works of St. John of the Cross* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1934).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 427; tr. Peers, III, 56.

³⁴ *The Spiritual Canticle*, st. 26, Gerardo, II, 297; Eng. tr. Peers, III, 329 f.

is the cause and means of His communication.³⁵ St. Thomas likewise says that the seven gifts are connected with charity and, as a result, like the infused virtues, grow together with it, like parts of the same organism, as fingers grow with the hand.³⁶

In *The Living Flame of Love* St. John of the Cross adds: "And finally, all the movements and operations which the soul had aforesaid, and which belonged to the principle of its natural life, are now in this union changed into movements of God. For the soul, like the true daughter of God that it now is, is moved wholly by the Spirit of God, even as St. Paul says: that they that are moved by the Spirit of God are the sons of God."³⁷

He has something similar to say elsewhere in the same work:

We term the deepest centre of a thing the farthest point to which its being and virtue and the force of its operation and movement can attain. . . . Accordingly, we shall say that a stone, when it is within the earth, is in its centre, because it is within the sphere of its activity and movement . . . but it is not in the deepest part of that element . . . and when it attains to its centre and there remains to it no more power of its own to move farther, we shall say that it is in the deepest centre.

The centre of the soul is God; and, when the soul has attained to Him according to the whole capacity of its being, and according to the force of its operation, it will have reached the last and deep centre of the soul,³⁸ which will be when with all its powers it loves,

³⁵ *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 29; also Peers, I, 211; *The Spiritual Canticle*, st. 30.

³⁶ Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 5; q. 66, a. 2.

³⁷ *The Living Flame*, st. 2, tr. Peers, III, 56 f.

³⁸ The "depth of the soul" is also called the "peak of the soul" in relation to

understands, and enjoys God; and as long as it attains not as far as this, although it be in God, . . . it is not in the deepest centre, since it is capable of going still farther. Love unites the soul with God, and the more degrees of love the soul has, the more profoundly does it enter into God and the more it is centred in Him. . . . If it attain to the last degree, the love of God will succeed in wounding the soul even in its deepest centre—that is, in transforming and enlightening it as regards all the being and power and virtue of the soul, such as it is capable of receiving, until it be brought into such a state that it appears to be God. In this state the soul is like the crystal that is clear and pure; the more degrees of light it receives the greater concentration of light there is in it, and this enlightenment continues to such a degree that at last it attains a point at which the light is centred in it with such abundance that it comes to appear to be wholly light, and cannot be distinguished from the light, for it is enlightened to the greatest possible extent and thus appears to be light itself.³⁹

We read in *The Spiritual Canticle*: "And thus I think that this estate is never attained without the soul being confirmed in grace therein." This truth implies a certain participation in the impeccability of the blessed, brought about by God's special protection.⁴⁰

In this state God touches the soul so deeply that the mystics tell us that the divine contact makes an imprint on the very substance of the soul. What are we to understand by this statement in the light of St. Thomas' principles? As has been explained elsewhere,⁴¹ God keeps the substance of the soul

sensible things, according to whether they are considered as exterior or as inferior to it.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, st. I, tr. Peers, III, 24 f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, st. 22, Peers, II, 308. Cf. Salmanticenses, *De gratia*, q. 110, disp. III, dub. xi, no. 259.

⁴¹ *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*, Fr. ed., II, 560.

in existence by an act identified with His divine essence, the work of creation continued.⁴² Between the divine essence and the soul there exists a contact not quantitative and spatial, but supra-spatial, spiritual, and absolutely immediate. By this contact God operates immediately on the soul's substance, although the soul cannot operate immediately on itself; it can act, as a matter of fact, only by its faculties, knowing only by its intellect, loving and willing only by its will.⁴³

Further, God, the author of salvation, produces and conserves sanctifying grace in the very essence of the soul. From it the infused virtues and the gifts arise in the faculties.⁴⁴ He also moves the faculties either by proposing an object to them, or by applying them to the exercise of their acts *ab intus*, from within.⁴⁵ The divine touch which we are speaking of is a supernatural but deeper motion of this kind, acting on the very center of the will and of the intellect, where the faculties are rooted in the substance of the soul as their source.⁴⁶ Closer to the soul than the soul is to itself as the

⁴² Ia, q. 8, a. 1, 2, 3.

⁴³ Ia, q. 54, a. 1, 2, 3; q. 77, a. 1, 2.

⁴⁴ Ia IIae, q. 110, a. 3, 4.

⁴⁵ Ia IIae, q. 9, a. 4; q. 10, a. 4.

⁴⁶ Cf. Louis de Blois, *Institutio spiritualis*, chap. 12, where he says that the depth of the soul spoken of by most mystics apropos of the subject of transforming union, is the point of origin of the higher faculties, "*virium illarum est origo.*" Louis de Blois says, *ibid.*, in summing up Tauler: "Then, wholly turned toward God in pure love and inundated at the very depth of its essence by light incomprehensible, the eye of reason and of intellect is as though dazzled. . . . Then it knows by experience that God is infinitely above every representation of Him and everything that the intellect can comprehend. . . . It is lost in the solitary and obscure immensity of the Divinity, but lost in such a way as to find itself." St. John of the Cross also says in *The Living Flame*, st. 1: "The joy of the Holy Ghost is poured out in the substance of the soul, inaccessible to the senses and to Satan." Does he mean by this that the substance of the soul itself knows, loves, joys, without its faculties? We see that he does not from the context which reads: "At the soul's centre and inmost depth only the Holy Ghost is capable of making it act and of operating without the intervention of the senses." St. John of the Cross and the

conserving cause of its existence, God moves the center of its faculties from within by a spiritual contact, which, despite the obscurity of faith, reveals itself as divine.

This does not mean that the purified soul knows in an immediate and absolute manner its own substance and the sanctifying grace that it possesses, for the soul cannot operate immediately, without the concurrence of its faculties; but now it knows itself through the center of its supernaturalized faculties. Under the infused light of faith and of the gift of wisdom it has a quasi-experimental knowledge of the sanctifying grace which it possesses by the effect of a filial love more and more clearly distinguishable from sentimentality.⁴⁷ This supernatural love derived from grace and charity acts without reasoning by the infused light of the gift of wisdom and makes manifest to us God Himself present within us, giving us life, leading us to love Him with ever greater purity and strength, stirring up within us the desire to behold Him.

Let us add what *The Spiritual Canticle* has to tell us about spiritual betrothal: "It is not to be understood that to all such as arrive at this estate He communicates all that is expounded in these two stanzas, nor that He does so according to one single way and degree of knowledge and feeling. For to some souls He gives more and to others less; to some after one manner and to others after another; though souls be

majority of mystics speak descriptively and not ontologically, like experimental psychologists rather than like metaphysicians who prove that an angel and a soul can act only through their faculties, establishing a real distinction between the soul and its faculties through the formal objects of the latter. St. Thomas wrote from a metaphysical point of view when he composed his famous articles, *utrum essentia angeli sit sua virtus intellectiva* (Ia, q. 54, a. 3); *utrum essentia animae sit ejus potentia* (Ia, q. 77, a. 1). We have in the metaphysical and in the mystical two different but not contradictory viewpoints.

⁴⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, in *Ep. ad Rom.* 8: 16.

longing to either category can be in this estate of the spiritual betrothal. But we set down here the highest that is possible because in this is comprehended all else."⁴⁸ The same can be stated of quasi-continual transforming union as of spiritual marriage: it certainly admits of different degrees, including that enjoyed by the Blessed Virgin Mary during her lifetime on earth. Although souls may possess different degrees of transforming union we can truly say of all of them that they have reached their deepest and predestined center in this world.

Thus understood, the transforming union seems like the normal result of the abiding of the Blessed Trinity in a really purified soul, that is, a soul that has gone through the passive purifications to the end. As St. Thomas shows us, the indwelling of the divine persons requires from the very beginning a certain quasi-experimental knowledge of God, or at least the supernatural capacity for this knowledge through charity and the gift of wisdom. As the soul approaches the end of the passive purifications by the royal road of the cross, it reaches its full and normal development.

Then the soul imitates our Lord perfectly. Throughout His lifetime on earth, because of His fullness of grace, He possessed supreme happiness, perfect peace, and a strong desire for the cross as well, an ardor to accomplish fully His mission as Savior, priest, and victim. Perfect peace remained His even during the Passion and on the cross when He said, "It is consummated. . . . Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Indeed here was true peace, the tranquility of order recovered through the reconciliation of sinning humanity with its Creator. Something of the peace of Christ,

⁴⁸ *The Spiritual Canticle*, st. 14, tr. Peers, III, 259.

of the peace that holds fast even in the midst of adversities, belongs to the soul that has reached the transforming union. Jesus speaks of it in the beatitudes: "Blessed are they that mourn. . . . Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers. . . . Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake" and that, in the very midst of persecution, keep a deep peace not only for themselves but for others, to whom they communicate it, lifting up the hearts of all, even the most discouraged.

The commandment of love finds its complete realization in this life in perfect union with God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart"⁴⁹—from the very beginning, the time of sensible consolations, we love God with our whole heart; "and with thy whole soul"—when we are glad to spend ourselves in all kinds of work for our Lord then we love Him with our whole soul; "with all thy strength"—only later, especially during the painful purification of the soul can we be said to love God with all our strength; "and with thy whole mind"—before being purified the soul rarely mounted to the higher part of itself, the spirit, but after it has been purified it becomes established there, a true adorer in spirit and in truth.

The realization of such a union with God means the perfect consummation of the life of grace in this world and serves as a normal prelude to the life of heaven. It disposes souls to receive the beatific vision immediately after death, without passing through purgatory. None of us pass that way but through our own fault, as a result of negligences that could have been avoided by a more generous acceptance of the cross.

⁴⁹ Luke 10: 27.

Because this union forms a prelude to the life of heaven, it has, St. John of the Cross says, the "savor of eternal life." St. Thomas designates it by the expression "*inchoatio vitae aeternae*," life eternal begun in the obscurity of faith before opening out into the definitive flowering of vision. Few Christians reach such perfection in this world; yet, because of the first commandment, all of us ought to aspire to a charity increasing day by day and all of us should recall that, as St. John of the Cross has pointed out, in the evening of life we shall be judged by love, on the reality of our love for God and of our neighbor in God.⁵⁰

*The life of union
and the invisible missions of the divine persons*

Louis Chardon stands out among Thomistic theologians for the skill with which he has shown how transforming union normally results from the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in a truly purified soul. In *La Croix de Jésus* he says:

That true friendship which should exist between God and the holy soul is founded on grace. Now it is a law that perfect friendship produces union not merely by affection, but also, so far as possible,⁵¹ real and intimate presence, that there may be a trans-

⁵⁰ The whole doctrine of St. John of the Cross is summarized in the beautiful verses which he uses for his commentary in *The Living Flame*, tr. Peers, III, 18:

Oh, living flame of love That tenderly woundest my
soul in its deepest centre,
Since thou art no longer oppressive, perfect me now
if it be thy will, Break the web of this sweet encounter.
Oh, sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound! Oh, soft hand!
Oh, delicate touch
That savours of eternal life and pays every debt! In
slaying, thou hast changed death into life.

⁵¹ Even in this life created charity, since it constitutes an affective union, causes at least a desire for real union; on the other hand God, uncreated charity, produces this real union by preserving and increasing the life of grace within us and

formation of lover into the beloved, a complete union in which the beloved withholds nothing. Therefore, as the soul advances in God's friendship, grace, the form or, if you will, the cause of this friendship, dominates its essence and powers more and more fully, taking more intimate possession of them. Because of this, the divine persons have a more perfect presence within the soul. They dwell in souls only by means of grace and its properties and They produce within them effects that reveal to us more the action of God than of creatures.

This transformation reaches a point in some souls where we can hardly discern anything human any more. As a drop of water spilt into a cask of wine is entirely lost by taking on the color, the odor, and the taste of wine; as the glowing iron resembles the fire which penetrates it; and as the air filled with the sun's rays becomes transformed into light and seems to be light itself rather than another element illuminated by it: in like manner souls die a wonderful and mysterious death to all affection and to every human operation and become so perfectly possessed by the Spirit of God, so united to Him and so deified in Him, that the glorious Trinity lives, operates, and acts in them more really than they do in themselves.⁵²

Louis Chardon deduces three important truths from the relation of the growth of charity to the divine and invisible missions.

The first is that (having already received the divine missions with the state of grace) souls must make considerable progress in grace to receive them anew. . . . Those who make no advance in the spiritual life fail to dispose themselves to receive the divine persons anew (or to enter into greater intimacy with Them).

bringing us to perform supernatural acts. See Vol. I, Part I, chap. 3, of the present work.

⁵² *La Croix de Jésus*, entretien 3, chap. 6, at end. (Paris: ed. Lethielleux, 1895), II, 297 ff.

The second truth is that no kind of knowledge of God, however profound, subtle, or clear it may be, can render a soul worthy of these missions. . . . It must be rooted in grace . . . and in grace that grows, is fruitful, acts with increasing energy, and attains to greater heights of perfection. Savants fail to dispose themselves for these blessed missions when they trouble themselves more about knowing the mystery of the Trinity than of making themselves pleasing to the glorious and triune God, when they possess more curiosity about divinity than attentive and eager love for the divine Being, when, in a word, their charity lags behind their knowledge.

The third truth is that no grace, no knowledge, no perfection of the spiritual (i.e., the supernatural) order can exist without the invisible missions of the divine persons. It is not enough for Paul to plant, for Apollo to water: God must give the increase. . . . I dare add that the visible sending of the divine persons (the Incarnation and Pentecost) have effect and application in souls only through the invisible missions. . . . It should not astonish us to find Jesus deeming His mother happier for having conceived Him in her spirit than for having conceived and borne Him in her womb. The mystery of the Incarnation gave Him to her but once; the invisible mission gives Him to her again every time the superabundant grace within her increases. . . . The first plenitude of grace was given to her at the Immaculate Conception. . . . The second came to her with her divine Son, when she became His mother. . . . The third descended upon her when the Holy Ghost was given to her visibly in the Cenacle on the day of Pentecost. The first served as a preparation for the second, and the third perfected the other two.⁵³

Chardon skillfully applies the doctrine of the invisible missions to the spiritual crosses received by advanced souls,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-306.

either for their purification or for their participation, with Jesus and Mary, in the work of their neighbor's salvation.⁵⁴ He shows that the hardest crosses are reserved for the most perfect, that they bring about great perfection and close union with God, drawing into the soul a new sending of the divine persons.

The original edition contains these words:

Spiritual crosses, being powerful means of purifying the spirit, help to attract a more perfect mission of the divine persons. The more afflicting the cross, the more it severs the soul from other things, and the more perfectly it prepares the soul for an increasingly intimate abiding of the Trinity. Crosses rather than consolations introduce God into the most secret and profound recesses of the soul.

The soul grows from tenderness into strength, leaving aside sensible affections to receive whatever impressions God Himself will make upon it. Lest too frequent consolations interfere with our tending toward Him, God stops up the sweet stream of consolation to make our thirst drive us in search of the source. He keeps back His gifts that He may bestow Himself. . . . Gently He enters our souls and makes Himself master, claiming the attention of all our powers, that they may enjoy the one necessary Good and, as they should, love Him with a love far above the love of all other things, since He is the Creator and they are His creatures.⁵⁵

How beautifully all this is said! Could we find a more closely knit union of speculative theology and true mysticism? Could there be a better demonstration that the transforming union alluded to by the saints is the normal result of the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, entretien 3, chap. 8.

⁵⁵ Original edition, pp. 471-76, 149.

indwelling of the three divine persons in a truly purified soul? ⁵⁶

Evidence in St. Teresa's writings

The account of the transforming union given by St. John of the Cross and Louis Chardon's explanation of it by the progress of grace and the invisible missions of the divine persons are both sublime. St. Teresa's writings in the seventh mansions belong to the same high level. She remarks that some people in these mansions have an intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity present within them; but that this insight varies in clarity and occurs intermittently, does not belong to the essence of transforming union, and even seems to have no necessary connection with it, St. John of the Cross contenting himself with describing it as a very high contemplation of the divine perfections.

St. Teresa also observes ⁵⁷ that when such union has been reached ecstasies generally come to an end, and that what constitutes the bedrock of this most eminent state is nothing miraculous; the higher faculties are passively attracted to their deepest center, where the Blessed Trinity abides. Because of this grace, the soul cannot doubt the presence of the divine persons within itself and is almost never deprived of their companionship. St. Teresa says that the soul recognizes by certain secret aspirations that God is giving it life. ⁵⁸ Many authors consider the graces of this mansion the equiv-

⁵⁶ Blessed Grignon de Montfort leads us to the same conclusion under a different form in his excellent books, *La vraie dévotion à Marie*, tr. Montfort Fathers (Bayshore, N.Y.: 1941), *Lettre circulaire aux amis de la Croix* (Paris: A. Le Clerc, 1845), *L'Amour de la divine Sagesse* (Paris: Gaume frères, 1856). The last named work recalls the beautiful pages of Blessed Henry Suso, which are penetrated with the same traditional doctrine just set down here.

⁵⁷ *Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansion, chap. 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

alent of a special revelation making the soul certain of its state of grace and predestination. ⁵⁹

The effects of the transforming union are those of the fully developed theological virtues and the gifts. The passions hardly trouble at all the souls that possess it; while they experience the actual grace of the transforming union they commit no deliberate venial sin. ⁶⁰ Outside of these times they may happen to commit some faults, but they quickly make reparation for them. What is striking about them is their self-forgetfulness, their great desire to suffer after our Lord's example, and their real joy in persecution. They share in the very strength of Christ and in His boundless love of neighbor; they practice at the same time seemingly contradictory virtues, justice and mercy, strength and gentleness, the simplicity of the dove and the wisdom of the serpent, uniting the highest possible contemplation with practical common sense about their daily concerns, bearing a marked likeness to Christ. ⁶¹ St. Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogue* ⁶² gives a like report of this state. Wherever we find it described we see set before us the dispositions of a soul purified and prepared for immediate entrance into heaven after death.

⁵⁹ Cf. Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Theologia mystica, Proem.*, a. 8; Scaramelli, *Dir. myst.*, tr. II, c. 22, no. 258; Meynard, O.P., *Vie intérieure*, Vol. II, no. 270.

Certain passages from great orthodox mystics are thus reconciled with what the Council of Trent says, that without a special revelation no one in this life can be sure of being in the state of grace, and with greater reason, of persevering in grace until death. Sess. 6, chap. 9 et 12; can. 13, 14, 16.

⁶⁰ St. Teresa, *op. cit.*, Seventh Mansion, chap. 2.

⁶¹ Pascal greatly admired the harmony between virtues apparently quite contrary: "I admire an excess of one virtue, like bravery, only if I see at the same time its opposite virtue, as in the case of Epaminondas, who was extremely brave and extremely benign, for to have one and not the other is not to mount high but to fall low. Greatness is not to be found in reaching one extreme but in touching both extremes at the same time and in fulfilling too all that lies between them." *Pensées* no. 353, ed. E. Brunschvicg.

⁶² *Treatise of Divine Providence*, tr. Thorold, pp. 26 ff.

CHAPTER XII

THE PLACE OF THE UNITIVE LIFE
AND THE MYSTICAL ORDER*A comparison of the views of St. Alphonsus with the
thought of St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross*¹

All that has gone before shows clearly enough, we believe, that the unitive life, like the passive purifications of the senses and of the soul presupposed by it, belongs to the mystical order, that is to say, it requires infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith. The testimony of St. John of the Cross is explicit on the point and seems to conform perfectly to tradition.² However, because St. Alphonsus Liguori has sometimes been quoted as opposed to him, we should like to make certainty more certain by comparing the two.

Father Charles Keusch of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer has recently published a study on the spirituality of St. Alphonsus which will be of service in making this comparison.³ His work purposes to make people more familiar with St. Alphonsus' thought on the relationship between the ascetical and the mystical life: whether the ascetical is ordered to the mystical as to its normal fulfillment, or

¹ Author's note: The reading of the present chapter is not at all necessary to follow the thought developed throughout the whole work. It serves as a sort of appendix to the preceding chapter.

² Elsewhere, in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 178, 235-38, 259 f., 268 ff., we have shown the accord of the masters concerning the normal although eminent character of infused contemplation.

³ *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, pp. [189] to [210].

whether, on the contrary, infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith consists in something by nature extraordinary and outside of the normal way of sanctity, like revelations and visions. Because St. Alphonsus has sometimes been quoted as supporting the second point of view, defended by many authors of his time, we are fortunate to have the different shadings of his doctrine brought out with great delicacy and distinction by one of his sons dedicated in a special way to the study of his spiritual doctrine. With him let us examine the general characteristics of St. Alphonsus' teaching on spirituality and then let us compare it with the doctrine set forth in this work, following St. Thomas' principles and their application to spiritual progress as worked out by St. John of the Cross.

ARTICLE I

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. ALPHONSUS:
ITS GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

After twenty years of work, Father Keusch has put before us his explanation of St. Alphonsus in the book, *Die Aszetik des hl. Alfons Maria von Liguori, im Lichte der Lehre vom geistlichen Leben in alter und neuer Zeit*.⁴ This work has had three editions in ten years and has been highly praised at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, where the author brilliantly defended his doctrinal thesis. It contains a penetrating study of the personality of St. Alphonsus, an examination of the early and modern sources on which he drew, and the entire literature concerning the subject.

⁴ *Druck und Verlag der Bonifacius-Druckerei*, Paderborn, 1926, Zweite und dritte Auflage, 1 vol. in-8, 407 pp.

The doctrinal points gone into most deeply include the concept of perfection, the call to perfection for Christians in general, and for priests and religious in particular, detachment, and divine union. To reach some conclusion on the value of this spirituality, Father Keusch considers it in the light of St. Thomas' principles and then compares it with the more modern schools of spirituality of St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Vincent de Paul. Some critics accuse him of straining to prove the harmony of St. Alphonsus' views with St. Thomas' and do not believe that the Doctor of Salvation was actually so completely Thomistic in his doctrine.

The author answers that he has made his appraisal from a theological rather than from a historical point of view and that, to arrive at an exact definition of doctrine, he could choose no better guide than St. Thomas. St. Alphonsus' attachment to the Angelic Doctor is furthermore deeper than is generally supposed. Shortly after his death, a Dominican master of theology, Father Vincenzo Gregorio Lavazzoli, professor at the Theological College of St. Thomas at Naples, wrote: "We are fully aware of how much the servant of God loved our Order and especially St. Thomas, whom he took as his only and sure guide in all his works."⁵

The spiritual works of St. Alphonsus are to be recommended because of their doctrinal certainty, the saintly unction found on every page and, above all, because of their eminently practical character. They are calculated to round out the great speculative views to which St. Thomas ac-

⁵ Reproduced at the beginning of A. M. Tannoja's *Mémoires sur la vie et l'institut de saint Alphonse*, 3 vols. (Naples, 1793-1802).

customs us, and to show how these ought to give direction to our daily actions in advancing toward perfection.

St. Alphonsus has been declared a doctor of the Church precisely because of his sure doctrine on moral and spiritual matters. He was given by God to His Church at a time when the Jansenist heresy was turning souls away from the contemplation of infinite mercy, when quietist errors tended to drive generosity out of the service of God, when the doctrines of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopedists were ravaging the minds of men. In the sorry eighteenth century this great saint served as the voice of God reminding men of His indefeasible rights and even more of His boundless mercy, restating the greatness of the divine law and the Christian conscience. He gave new life to moral doctrine, then so often smothered under the vain discussions of casuists more interested in the material circumstances of human acts than in the divine exigencies of the last end; and he re-established, for the greater good of souls, the confessional as the center of parochial life.

As to spirituality properly so called, he continued the work of the sanctification of the common people undertaken by St. Dominic and St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century and continued by St. Francis de Sales in the seventeenth. The latter had, as it were, brought spirituality out of the cloister and among seculars but his *Introduction to the Devout Life* addressed only people of culture. St. Alphonsus Liguori, like the great popular preachers of the Middle Ages, brought himself down to poor folk, to country people, who were receiving all too little care, that he might teach them, in language wonderfully suited to their understanding, the

beauty of the mysteries of faith and of the Christian life. His excellent hymns to the Blessed Sacrament, always so popular in Italy, lifted up the souls of the simple, revealing to them the grandeur of the mysteries of the Rosary, the beauties of the Eucharist, the practice of the love of God, the great means of prayer. In his day he became throughout the whole region around Naples an incarnation of the gospel spirit: "The poor have the gospel preached to them."⁶ After perusal of his wonderful life, no one could travel through that part of the country or visit the shrine of Pagani, where his relics are venerated, without being deeply stirred and moved to thank God for having raised up for His Church at such a time a saint who has left us both his teachings and sons to diffuse them.⁷

St. Alphonsus' influence is not limited to this one field only; he deeply affected the clergy and religious, both men and women. We can always read with much profit the *Selva* or *The Sanctified Priest*, the different writings relative to pastoral life and its great responsibilities, the counsels given to his sons, particularly to student novices, on the relations between piety and study. In these he shows how piety should animate and supernaturalize study and how study should preserve piety from errors due to imagination and sentiment. Many religious find their spiritual nourishment in *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, *The Glories of Mary*, *The Way of Salvation*, the second part of

⁶ Matt. 11: 5.

⁷ One of the best popularizers of St. Alphonsus in France is Père Achille Desurmont. He has published several well-known books, *L'Art d'assurer son salut*, *Le Credo et la Providence*, *La Charité sacerdotale*. The second of these works particularly contains a study of the mysteries of Providence in the spirit of St. Alphonsus, considered from a doctrinal, ascetical, and social viewpoint.

which contains the best "reflections for souls desiring to advance in divine love." These "reflections" of some sixty pages suffice of themselves to show the sublimity of the doctrine proposed by the saint to every really interior Christian desirous of advancing in God's love.

A soul of deep and unremitting prayer and of perfect abnegation, the founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer went through, as we know, the most grievous interior purifications and the most wounding exterior trials that the founder of an order could know. This is why, even when St. Alphonsus treats only questions of the ascetical order or when he speaks of moral virtues and gives practical advice for beginners, his words have the inspiration of mystical truths, the breath of the theological virtues, the greatness of the spirit of faith, the confidence of abandonment, and the generosity of charity. These presuppose the light of the gifts of wisdom and of understanding and point ahead to the higher end to which asceticism is ordered, the intimacy of divine union.

If many of St. Alphonsus' works have a clearly defined practical character, let us not forget that the great height of his spirit of faith and the increasingly generous aspiration of his heart belong to the mystical order and serve well to turn souls toward all that belongs to the normal way of salvation, toward everything that ought to dispose them for the life of heaven, the possession of God through the beatific vision.

When, for example during a retreat, we take time to read slowly and in God's presence the spiritual writings of this great servant of His, we see how much he was ruled by the Holy Ghost and what a high degree of divine union he enjoyed. Under the influence of the seven gifts, his union with

God was not only active but passive as well, *patiebatur divina*. From this source his life drew its sublimity, its power, and, in spite of the multiplicity of acts involved in certain practices of his,⁸ its unity. This could not help but be apparent to the good Christian people to whom he preached; his words awoke in them a desire for union with God in the full sense of the commandment of love, which sets no limits whatever to charity but bids us love with all our heart. Some people with their minds full of external things felt his power less because of his great prudence, his care to warn them against exaltation; others, of a more spiritual mold, felt it all the better for that, his very prudence dispelling all compromise, simulation, and illusion.

ARTICLE II

A COMPARISON OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. ALPHONSUS WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF ST. THOMAS AND THE DOCTRINE OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

We now return to a question introduced at the beginning of the chapter: Does St. Alphonsus consider, as we have often taught,⁹ that the ascetical is ordered to the mystical as to its normal consummation? To put it more precisely, does he hold that infused contemplation—absolutely distinct from

⁸ In his life of the saint, Père Berthe relates, chap. 6, that each evening before going to sleep the saint made himself say ten acts of love, ten acts of trust, ten acts of contrition, ten acts of conformity to God's will, to which he adds acts of love and abandonment to our Lord and the Blessed Mother. This multiplicity of acts belonged chiefly to the lower faculties but in the intellect and will there was rather a continuous act such as that performed by a man of prayer when reciting the Rosary. His attentive search for ways of pleasing God evidences St. Alphonsus' great charity.

⁹ Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* and a number of articles appearing in *La vie spirituelle* from 1919 to 1929.

extraordinary graces such as prophetic revelations, visions, stigmatizations, and so forth—forms part of the normal way of sanctity, is the full perfection of the Christian life; or rather, since in fact we so rarely encounter infused contemplation or perfection itself for that matter, does he look upon it as something extraordinary, like private revelations?

The question often arises these days, and we encounter it stated in oversimplified terms not only to the neglect of the nuances of the subject but also to the disregard of its essentials. As a result, it is robbed of significance, and the answer to it which we maintain as traditional also loses meaning and importance and becomes strangely distorted either by those who admit it spontaneously without sufficient reflection or those who reject it without any thorough examination.

Father Keusch, who has spent his life studying the spiritual doctrine of St. Alphonsus and desires to follow him faithfully, tells us of this matter:

La vie spirituelle has given new life . . . to St. Thomas' doctrine on perfection, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and contemplation. It has broken down, so to say, the barriers of the school of pure asceticism to allow the integral notion of sanctity to shine out with much greater luster than before. . . . In themselves, it seems . . . these beautiful doctrines are not in opposition to the deep thought of St. Alphonsus. The holy doctor admits—we have no formal text to deny it—the unicity of the interior life, and for sanctity the possibility of the existence of . . . and even a certain necessity for, transitory infused prayer. For reasons of theology, of experience, and of conscience, which we have set forth, he thinks that mystical states of more intense development are not necessary, although elsewhere he concedes their high efficacy and excellence.¹⁰

¹⁰ *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, pp. [207] ff.

Father Keusch's judgment, because of his profound knowledge of St. Alphonsus' spirituality, is of great interest, and we are happy to see it formulated in this wise. He adds a little farther on:

The apparent opposition between St. Alphonsus' doctrine and that given in *La vie spirituelle* arises in my opinion from diversity of method. *La vie spirituelle* sees things "from the heights." . . . It shows us the origins, development, and consummation of the interior life in the light of Thomistic principles. Its point of view we share in many ways and believe that its sublime outline correctly sketches the approaches to heaven. The zealous apostle St. Alphonsus has followed the opposite method. A man in the midst of an active life, he sees things "from the valleys" . . . and builds his theory from experience, although he takes into consideration the data of theology.¹¹

"We conclude then," Father Keusch finishes by saying, "that there seems to be no fundamental doctrinal discord between St. Alphonsus and *La vie spirituelle*, although in questions of method diversity appears. Let us add a prayer that it be often given us to complete the teachings of the Angelic Doctor with the thought of the Zealous Doctor for the inevitable profit of souls."

Having taken up again recently the invigorating spiritual works of St. Alphonsus, which we propose to study further with the purpose that Father Keusch desired to have pursued, we are led to believe that the doctrinal accord is even more complete than he thinks and that the difference of method, although it exists, seems more apparent than real. A brief examination of these two questions will therefore follow.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. [209].

Diversity of method

In speaking of method, we must make a distinction here between the method of doctrinal exposition that is followed in such articles as we have written for *La vie spirituelle* and the method of practical teaching to be used for preaching, which must be adapted to different audiences, and lastly, the method of direction, which must be suited to individual souls. In the latter case, the question arises not only of the preservation of a logical sequence of ideas, but of prudence; and when we recall how St. Thomas cautions us to practice this virtue,¹² we can, it seems, fully agree with St. Alphonsus.

St. Thomas is the first to tell us that a foreseen and desired end is first in the order of intention but last in the order of realization.¹³ Accomplishment must begin by employing the lowest kinds of means in order to rise by degrees to the use of higher means and so to come at last to achieve the end, conceived, desired, and willed before anything else. Elsewhere¹⁴ we have developed the consequence of this principle of spirituality. The most elementary prudence moves us never to lose sight of it. A saying goes that a good life is thought out during youth and realized during maturity. The conception of an ideal comes at the beginning; its realization only at the end.

The architect first conceives the building that he plans to erect in all its grandeur and beauty and then he decides on the means that he must use to build it, and when he starts

¹² IIa IIae, q. 47, a. 56.

¹³ Ia IIae, q. 1, a. 4.

¹⁴ Cf. *La vie spirituelle*, September, 1927, pp. 573-89, "Ne brûlons pas les étapes," an article reproduced in the 7th edition of *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*, pp. 776-89.

construction it never occurs to him to begin the arches before laying the foundation. What must we think of any director who, having disclosed to someone under his direction the beauty of Christian perfection by reading the evangelical beatitudes to him from the Sermon on the Mount, then attempts to begin the construction of his spiritual edifice not with the foundation, by the spade work of humility, mortification, and obedience, but with the topmost part of the building? He would be like an architect essaying to begin the erection of a cathedral with the spire or a young bird trying to fly before growing its wings.

From this viewpoint, the most elementary common sense demands that we admit as indispensable the first of the three propositions drawn up by Father Keusch as representing St. Alphonsus' thought. Father Keusch summarizes it thus: "Before introducing a soul into the higher regions of the spiritual life constituted by the presence of the mystical element or by the exercise of the prayer of contemplation properly so called, St. Alphonsus demanded with redoubled insistence that the life of ordinary virtue be first quite solidly established."¹⁵ Following St. Thomas,¹⁶ we have always said the same thing: that the active life or the practice of the moral virtues regulating the movements of our sensuous appetency and the acts of our will must precede the contemplative life, which becomes thereafter the soul of the apostolate.¹⁷

The expression "rushing souls into the mystical way" shocks us no less than the disciples of St. Alphonsus. No serious theologian, and no director with even a modicum of

¹⁵ *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, p. [199].

¹⁶ *Ila Ilac*, q. 182, a. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 188, a. 6.

prudence, would adopt such a policy. There seems little difference between pushing people into the mystical way and forcing them to prophesy or work miracles; for, after all, despite the fact that we maintain that infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith belongs to the normal way of sanctity, we firmly hold that God infuses it into our souls and that none of us can acquire it by our own efforts or introduce others into it by means of direction. The quietists, on the contrary, upheld their passivity as acquired, as entered upon at will through the cessation of all activity, a sort of pious sleep.

A much more understandable expression is to be found earlier in Father Keusch's work where he says: "St. Alphonsus does not belittle mystical graces; quite the opposite, he presents them as desirable but only for those souls who are prepared for them by God's invitation." We should recognize the great prudence that St. Alphonsus shows here. He is more the mystic than he would have us know. When he speaks of these sublime things to the general run of pious souls, he prudently tones down what he has to say in order to avoid the risk of having them overreach God's grace. In this prudence, every director should imitate him, especially when dealing with youthful imaginations, for he was, as Father Keusch says, one of the most skilled handlers of souls that ever lived.¹⁸ Let us not forget, however, that he avoided

¹⁸ We have no need of a great deal of experience with souls to know that when we speak too soon to young religious about passive purifications instead of simply saying that we should carry our cross daily, some of them are going to conclude that they have entered the dark night of the soul at the first experience of dryness or darkness. Nothing could be more ridiculous.

They could well have the first chapters of *The Dark Night* read to them, since these deal with the faults of beginners, the seven capital sins as they are encountered in the life of piety under the guise of spiritual sensuality or spiritual pride; but it is wise to wait before giving them all the works of St. John of the Cross, for some of them, thinking that they have already overcome the faults of beginners, will

both of two extremes. He knew that a director should intervene neither too early nor too late and he said that sometimes "God calls us without being heard."¹⁹ As soon as "God's invitations" began in souls under his direction he would detect them because of his supernatural vigilance. Many other directors discover them only much later and allow souls to mark time for a long period because, for example, they attribute to melancholy the aridities attendant on the beginning of habitual infused prayer.²⁰

The prudent practical direction given by St. Alphonsus in no way runs counter to the speculative doctrine that the normal development of the gifts of the Holy Ghost includes not an individual and proximate but a general and remote call to all interior souls to enter upon infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith.²¹ St. Alphonsus' prudence makes him give that kind of direction which leads souls to desire divine union without telling them exactly how contemplation of the mysteries of faith contributes to that end. We

go on to read with avidity the second book of *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame* as well; they will thus rob these beautiful works of their freshness by attempting to become acquainted with them too soon and grasping no more than their outer expression; later others more humble than they will be nourishing themselves with these living fruits but they will be incapable of assimilating them because they have not grown up, resembling toddlers who despise milk but cannot yet chew meat.

Everything in its place and time: otherwise we shall have something like spirituality rather than spirituality itself, an absolutely deplorable thing. Monstrosities can be made by applying a form beautiful in itself to matter not yet disposed to receive it. To make a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin we need not only a good mold; but we need also clay that is neither too dry nor too wet, otherwise in a day or two our statues will not be worth much.

¹⁹ St. Alphonsus, *Opere* (Torino: Marietti, 1887), III, 295.

²⁰ Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, the prologue.

²¹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 5: "Whether the gifts of the Holy Ghost are connected." The meaning of the expression "remote and general call" as distinguished from "individual and proximate call" has been explained at length elsewhere. Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 337-427.

can see clear evidence of this in the saint's meditations for the time of Ascension and Pentecost²² and in his reflections for those desiring to advance in divine love.²³ In his novena to the Holy Ghost he tries to draw souls out of the shadow of sin by telling them: "The Holy Ghost, called the *lux beatissima*, inflames our hearts with His divine splendor, making us know the vanity of earthly goods, the value of those of eternity, the importance of salvation, the worth of grace, God's goodness and Christ's infinite love for us. . . . St. Teresa says that God is not loved because He is not known. Wherefore the saints are always asking God for light: *Emitte lucem; illumina tenebras meas; revela oculos meos*. Without divine light we can neither avoid destruction nor find God."²⁴ Can anyone say that the saint had no thought of infused contemplation when speaking in this way of the supernatural light received from the Holy Ghost? Similar passages are found throughout his spiritual works. Addressing all of us and speaking from the abundance of his heart, he goes beyond the strict limits of the purely ascetical and leads us to aspire, with humility and discretion, to a closer union with God and to whatever that normally requires of the understanding.

The saint invites those whom he directs, whenever they say the Office, to be supernaturally attentive to the words of the psalms. If we follow his advice, we shall grasp more and more perfectly the meaning of the aspirations that they contain: "*Da mihi intellectum, et scrutabor legem tuam; da mihi intellectum, et discam mandata tua; da mihi intellectum, et*

²² *Opere* (Torino: Marietti, 1887), II, 393.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, 249-314.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 394.

vivam."²⁵ God inspires this petition said so often by all priests and religious; it contains and expresses a holy and humble desire for the light of the gift of understanding, which, together with the gift of wisdom, constitutes the principle of infused contemplation.²⁶

St. Alphonsus used these aspirations often, even when speaking to the general public, and certainly not because he had forgotten the rule of prudence: *nulla nimia securitas, ubi periclitatur aeternitas*. He knew full well that complete security can be found only in perfect docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. And if, as Father Keusch says, "Above all he never left off recommending St. John of the Cross to young confessors for a deeper study of things mystical," he did so because he knew that in these matters no one has done more to warn us against the desire for extraordinary graces like visions and revelations than the author of *The Dark Night*, while at the same time he continually leads interior souls to desire the light of the Holy Ghost, without which they cannot grow in the spirit of faith and reach divine union. He even makes the profound remark that a desire for extraordinary graces turns us away from true contemplation wherein the soul lives more and more in the blessed darkness of faith.²⁷

The difference of method between St. Alphonsus and St. John of the Cross arises in large part from the different en-

²⁵ Ps. 118: 34, 73, 144.

²⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 8; q. 45.

²⁷ In the *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, St. John of the Cross puts much insistence on the mistake imprudent directors make by concerning themselves through curiosity with souls favored by visions and revelations. We can find nothing stronger than these passages in their condemnation of the desire for revelations and at the same time in the encouragement of a desire for the perfect spirit of faith found in infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation, the way to divine union.

vironment in which they made their influence felt. St. Alphonsus wrote in an age suffering from the aberrations of the quietists and, as Father Keusch says, he had in mind two classes of readers: one, young confessors, to whom he directed his scientific works particularly; the other, a circle of men and women readers made up of average pious persons for whom he intended his works on spirituality. St. John of the Cross says himself at the end of the prologue to the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* that he was speaking principally to the men and women religious of his own Order, at whose request he wrote; then he adds the remark that the solid and substantial doctrine given was addressed to all, provided that they had made up their minds to pass through the detachment of soul which he preached.

The difference of method seems, therefore, more apparent than real, if we compare the practical direction given by St. Alphonsus not with the speculative teaching founded on the principles of St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, but with the practical direction inspired by these principles and instrumental in applying them with prudence and according to different circumstances.

*Comparison of method: a path to comparison
of doctrine*

Without trying to make their teaching identical, we seem justified in recognizing agreement and accord in doctrinal matters between these doctors of the Church. St. Alphonsus, having told souls that they can desire contemplation properly so called, redoubles his insistence that they must first solidly establish the life of ordinary virtue. Father Keusch

points this out in the first of the three propositions with which he summarizes the teaching of his master.

This rule of direction in no way runs counter to the doctrine which we have set forth here, if by an "ordinary virtuous life" is meant the virtues which ought to be commonly practiced in the way usually called purgative: self-imposed mortification, both exterior and interior, patience, meekness, humility, obedience, and the rest. But does St. Alphonsus consider that these virtues reach a notably higher degree without the soul passing through the interior trials remarked by St. Augustine,²⁸ St. Gregory the Great,²⁹ St. Bernard,³⁰ Hugh of St. Victor,³¹ and St. Thomas?³²

It seems that in the crucible of purgation infused contemplation begins in aridity and with the realization of the emptiness of all things created. The Holy Ghost opens our minds to this view through the gift of knowledge,³³ giving us, by contrast, a glimpse of the infinite greatness of God. This "seeing," distinctly different from discursive meditation, serves, according to St. Alphonsus, as the principle of perfect detachment in the practice of solid virtue. All this sounds remarkably like St. Teresa's reflections on the indifference demanded by some spiritual reading books. To their requirement that we be indifferent to the evil said of us, that we rejoice even more than if something good were said, that we care nothing for honor and become quite detached from our

²⁸ *De quantitate animae*, c. 33, a description of the difficult work of purification; *De sermone Domini in monte*, Bk. I, c. 3, 4, on the beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

²⁹ *In Ezech.* Bk. II, hom. 2, nos. 2, 3.

³⁰ *Sermo* 71, 12-14; 23, 16.

³¹ *In Eccl.*, hom. 1.

³² *Ia IIae*, q. 61, a. 5.

³³ *Ia IIae*, q. 9, a. 4.

relatives and a whole host of other things, she observes that in her opinion all this is a pure gift of God, a supernatural good.³⁴ She warns us, too, that, even after years of prayer, or better, of meditation, we shall not advance much if we cling to love of honor and of temporal goods; whereas perfect prayer frees us from these faults.³⁵

St. Alphonsus evidently thinks no differently when, treating of love of solitude, he says:

God does not speak to us in the midst of the talk and transactions of the world; or if He does speak, we do not hear Him. God's words are the inspirations, lights, and secret invitations by which saints are enlightened and encompassed by divine love; but whoever has no love for solitude cannot hear the sound of God's voice. . . . When He desires to lift a soul to an eminent degree of perfection, He leads it to withdraw into some place of solitude and there He speaks to it, not through the ears of the body but of the soul; and in this way He enlightens it and encompasses it with His divine love. "*Ducam eam ad solitudinem et loquar ad cor ejus.*" I will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart (Osee 2: 14). . . . At least let us try as far as possible to secure some place of retreat where we can be alone with God and thus obtain the strength to overcome the disadvantages of our necessary dealings with the world. . . .³⁶ Those whose position obliges them to live in the world may have to carry on its business, walk its streets, appear in its public places, but they can have, nevertheless, solitude of heart and union with God, provided that they keep their hearts detached from worldly things. . . . "Be still and see that I am God" (Ps. 45: 11). To be enlightened with divine light and so to realize and love God's goodness, we must put a check upon our

³⁴ St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 31.

³⁵ *Way of Perfection*, chap. 12.

³⁶ *Opere*, ed. cit., II, 295.

selves, that is, we must rid ourselves of earthly attachments, for they prevent us from knowing God.³⁷

All these pages compose a discreet invitation to desire contemplation under a title which runs no risk of exciting flights of imagination: "Love of solitude; solitude of heart."³⁸ In the beautiful chapter on aridity of soul in the same "Reflections"³⁹ the saint shows the dawning of contemplation which, though ignorant of its own existence, instinctively leads us beyond and above our own miseries to God. We come to know true humility, learning from ourselves yet taught by God. St. Alphonsus cites the example of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who remained a long time in this arid quiet, telling us that she imagined herself to have neither love of God nor hope nor faith, yet kept her gaze always on God and sought her rest in the arms of the divine will. St. Francis de Sales observed that her soul reminded him of a deaf person gifted with a beautiful voice but unable to enjoy her own singing. In the *Praxis confessarii*⁴⁰ St. Alphonsus says that the soul often has (infused) prayer of quiet without any sensible sweetness.

When we meditate on the "Reflections" written for souls desiring to advance in God's love and deeply lived by the saint himself, we see how closely St. Alphonsus approaches what St. John of the Cross has to say about the necessity of those periods of aridity which he calls the night of the senses and the night of the soul. St. Alphonsus encouraged young confessors to read *The Dark Night of the Soul* and would

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴⁰ *Praxis*, no. 134.

never deny the two following propositions contained in its pages. The first reads: "The passive purification of the senses is common and occurs in a great number of beginners."⁴¹ Under the illumination of the Holy Ghost, those starting to live the interior life recognize the emptiness of created things much better than they ever could have done by meditating from many books. The second reads: "The proficient or advanced belong in the illuminative way, wherein God nourishes and strengthens their souls by infused contemplation."⁴² God accomplishes this through the gifts of understanding and wisdom, generally given according to the measure of our charity.⁴³ Yet often, let us not forget it, passive prayer is marked by aridity and provides no sensible consolation.

The spirit of prayer ordinarily develops together with the virtues, especially the love of God. St. Alphonsus, like the other saints, recognizes this. Without solitude of heart, in which the lights of the Holy Ghost are received, we can have only a certain degree of virtue but not generally those deep and solid virtues of the illuminative and the unitive way—humility without fear of contempt, and patience almost without any shadow of change, one of the marks of true perfection. We do not, then, see that any serious difference exists between the doctrine of St. Alphonsus as summarized by Father Keusch in his first proposition and the doctrine generally taught in *La vie spirituelle*.

We come then to the second proposition: "A life of virtue being realized, St. Alphonsus excludes from his plan of per-

⁴¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

⁴³ *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 27.

fection and the ends that he would seek neither passive transitory graces nor more lasting passive states. Although he upholds the latter as more perfect in themselves than the works of the active life, he does not believe them necessary for sanctity."⁴⁴

From the way Father Keusch expresses the thought of St. Alphonsus, it seems that he has a better grasp of it than some of his predecessors. He has labored long and arduously over it, made it a scholarly work, apparently a work of conscience. This would seem clear from many passages treating of the agreement between the doctrine expounded by St. Alphonsus and that generally taught in *La vie spirituelle*.⁴⁵ Like Father Keusch, we too believe such a reconciliation possible; and the doctrines seem even closer akin to one another than Father Keusch states in his second proposition. Passive purifications, even those of the senses, are already in fact, because of their aridity, a passive state lasting some time, and we believe that St. Alphonsus judges them no less necessary for sanctity than does St. John of the Cross, although his terminology may be different.

He notes in the *Praxis confessarii*:⁴⁶

Before leading the soul into the prayer of contemplation, God generally purifies it by supernatural aridity called the *purgatio spiritualis*, a spiritual purgation intended to free it from those imperfections which hinder contemplation. . . . When aridity is supernatural, it throws the soul into profound darkness, lasts longer than natural aridity, and increases daily. Placed in this state (*in tali statu constituta*), the soul feels itself separated from

⁴⁴ *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, p. [199].

⁴⁵ *Die Aszetik des hl. Alfons Maria von Liguori*, 3rd ed., p. 296, note 814.

⁴⁶ *Praxis*, c. ix, no. 128.

creatures and its gaze remains fixed on God and it has an ardent desire and a firm purpose to love Him perfectly; yet it discovers itself powerless to do so because of its imperfections, which seem to make it detestable in God's eyes. However, it continues practicing virtue. . . .

This trying aridity is an effect of grace, of a supernatural light, a light bringing suffering and, through its brilliance, darkness. Grace would communicate itself to the soul but finds the soul incapable because its powers are not sufficiently detached from sensible consolations, are still too material and full of sensible forms, images, and symbols; then this supernatural light produces in the soul an effect of darkness, a trying but profitable night. Through it, in fact, the soul comes to detach itself from all earthly pleasures and from the sensible consolations of the life of piety. Moreover, it acquires in this way a deep knowledge of its miseries and its impotence for good without the help of grace, and at the same time a great reverence for God, manifest to it in all His strength and majesty.⁴⁷ . . . After the purification of the senses, God usually accords the gift of contemplation, that is, supernatural recollection, and then quiet and union, which we shall speak of later. But before union, after passive recollection and quiet, God generally makes the soul undergo the passive purification of the spirit, willing it to experience a sort of death.⁴⁸ . . . Divine light makes the soul recognize its own nothingness and leads it into a real agony. . . . Sometimes

⁴⁷ If close attention is given to these words of St. Alphonsus, which well summarize the teaching of St. John of the Cross, it will be seen that external trials cannot produce the same effect as that infused light which penetrates to the depth of the faculties in order to detach them from things created and to make them bear in a supernatural way the exterior crosses so often borne with little profit.

⁴⁸ A little farther on, no. 137, St. Alphonsus speaks precisely and in conformity with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, who places the night of the soul at the beginning of the Sixth Mansion before spiritual betrothals, after the simple union of the Fifth Mansion. This passage shows that for him, as well as for St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, the night of the soul is a high passive state, since it comes after the prayer of quiet and simple passive union and prepares for transforming union, the fullness of the unitive way.

God allows this state of desolation to be accompanied by temptations to impurity, anger, blasphemy, incredulity, and despair.

The saint's words tell us plainly that he is talking about purifications proper to the mystical state.

In all causes considered for beatification and in almost all the lives of the saints, the question of these purifications comes up under the title of "interior trials" and during the discussion of the heroic character of their faith and hope. Can anyone think that St. Alphonsus judged these passive purifications unnecessary for sanctity or that he rejected the teaching of St. John of the Cross on the subject? The essential lines of St. John's teaching are well known:⁴⁹ Exterior trials cannot suffice to accomplish purgation of soul without this purifying interior light, which alone teaches us how to bear them with resignation, thankfulness, and love.

In the "Reflections" already quoted, St. Alphonsus aptly remarks: "Naturally all suffering repels us, but when divine love reigns in the heart, it makes it pleasing."⁵⁰ In the eleventh chapter, explaining our Savior's words, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me," he says: "To carry the cross that we must carry is not enough. Sinners carry theirs but without merit. To carry it meritoriously we must embrace it with love. . . . Since God wills that we keep on bearing it patiently, should we not carry it until death? . . . Those who love the Lord disinterestedly never abandon prayer, no matter what aridity and boredom they may experience. . . . Their actions have but one end, to please God; if He wills

⁴⁹ See the present work, Parts I, II, and III, chap. 11.

⁵⁰ *Reflections*, chap. 10.

it, they are ready to suffer aridity until death and even for all eternity."

This goes beyond the bounds of asceticism and pertains to the mystical life, necessitating a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and manifesting a suprahuman mode of the gifts of piety, fortitude, understanding, and wisdom, all growing together with charity. And if this abandonment to God endures in the midst of such sufferings as have been alluded to, then it comprises a state and presupposes the continual inspiration of the Holy Ghost. We can dispose ourselves for this or we can fail and lose it, but no personal efforts of ours can acquire abandonment of such a sort; it is infused. For this reason St. Alphonsus adds in the same passage: "O how dear to God is a soul who suffers and loves like this! O ineffable gift! O gift above all gifts! to love while suffering and to suffer while loving. . . . Give me, Lord, Thy love, which will bring me strength to suffer everything for love of Thee. Take everything from me, deprive me of all that I possess, parents, friends, health of body, indeed life itself, but leave me Thy love."

A little later in the same "Reflections" addressed to all generous interior souls, St. Alphonsus gives an explanation of St. Teresa's words: "Detach your heart from creatures, then seek God and you will find Him." He says: "You will not always obtain spiritual sweetness,⁵¹ for our Lord does not always give it to those who love Him during their life, only from time to time bestowing it upon them to make them

⁵¹ Here we really have the sense in which we must understand the proposition so commonly accepted: "Infused contemplation is not always accorded to the perfect." There are moments when they do not actually have it, especially when they do not have it in a consoling form; but it remains as if latent within them and they also preserve that peace *quae exsuperat omnem sensum*.

desire heaven more ardently; but He makes them experience an inner peace which is such that no sense pleasure can be compared with it: *Pax Dei, quae exsuperat omnem sensum*. . . . Divine love despoils us of everything else. . . . Lose all rather than be despoiled of God's love."

In the fourteenth chapter, which treats of the necessity of mental prayer, St. Alphonsus also writes: "Let us hear what St. John of the Cross has to say on the subject: 'Now it is that God teaches me His heavenly wisdom, enlightens my mind, and gives me His heart.' St. Louis Gonzaga also tells us that none of us can reach a high degree of perfection without much prayer, giving ourselves to it, continuing it, never quitting it, no matter what weariness may come to us."⁵² "We must pray to obtain the lights of the Holy Ghost . . . not to taste spiritual consolations, but to learn of God what He expects of us. . . . When we find ourselves powerless, let us humble ourselves; such prayer will profit us more than any other."⁵³

St. Alphonsus realizes that a purifying light is at work in these times of trial and that is why he adds: "Happy are those who in times of desolation cleave to prayer! God will overwhelm them with His graces."⁵⁴ Later he adds: "God lovingly contemplates acts of trust and resignation made in the midst of darkness."⁵⁵ This and other references throughout the same chapter certainly relate to obscure infused contemplation, such as that experienced for some time by St. Jane Frances de Chantal. It consists in nothing extraordinary, like visions and revelations, but in something eminent

⁵² *Reflections*, chap. 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, chap. 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 39.

yet normal in the development of sanctity; and that is the reason why St. Alphonsus talks about it in his reflections for the use of those who desire to advance in God's love.

Many similar texts could be quoted; these suffice, we believe, to show that St. Alphonsus does not reject the doctrine of St. John of the Cross that passive states of infused arid prayer—in other words, passive purification—are necessary for sanctity. Anyone familiar with the doctrine will grasp the cogency of this argument.

An examination of some difficulties

Perhaps it will be objected that in the *Praxis confessarii*, when St. Alphonsus comes to speak of passive union, having already described the passive purifications, the infused prayer of recollection and of quiet, infused negative and obscure contemplation, he says it is not necessary for perfection and that, as Cardinal Petrucci says, active union suffices.⁵⁶ By way of corroboration he cites a text of St. Teresa as quoted by Bernardo del Castelvetero to the effect that perfection consists not in ecstasy but in the union of our will with the divine will. He even remarks in passing that in the passive state of contemplation the soul gains no merit.⁵⁷

On this subject something further should be said:

(1) In a new edition of the *Praxis confessarii*, published at Rome, 1912, by Father G.-M. Blanc, C.S.S.R., a footnote⁵⁸ points out that St. Alphonsus here quotes St. Teresa as given by Bernardo del Castelvetero and that the exact text is not found in the saint's writings. The editor notes that St. Teresa,

⁵⁶ *Praxis*, chap. 9, no. 136 (St. Teresa's Fifth Mansion).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 127.

⁵⁸ *Praxis*, no. 136, p. 229.

when referring to people whom she knew, does not say that few souls are led by supernatural paths but rather just the opposite.⁵⁹ The fact that she says that perfection does not consist in ecstasy creates no difficulty for us, since ecstasy is only a concomitant phenomenon of passive union, which can, of course, exist without it.⁶⁰ Further, in this passage of the *Praxis*, St. Alphonsus expressly says that he understands by "passive union" a state higher than the passive purification of the senses, passive recollection, and the prayer of quiet. Therefore, even if passive union thus understood were not necessary for perfection, it would not follow that the passive states below it were also unnecessary, especially since the

⁵⁹ In these texts of St. Teresa and in others like them we must be careful to distinguish between those which relate to the general and remote call to contemplation and those dealing with the individual and proximate call. See what has been said on this subject in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 337-45.

⁶⁰ We have shown elsewhere, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 250-53, from St. Teresa's texts in the Fifth Mansion, chap. 3, and her *Life*, chap. 17, that simple passive union often occurs without suspension of the imagination and the memory, which sometimes even make war on the intellect and will. St. Teresa speaks of this incomplete mystical union in the *Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansion, chap. 3, saying that for the union in question suspension of the faculties is not necessary because the Lord can give His bounties in different ways and can lead souls to these mansions without bringing them by the "short cut" which she had pointed out.

This "short cut" and the delights to be found there have often been insufficiently understood. Some theologians—and this seems to be the interpretation given by Cardinal Petrucci and Bernardo de Castelvetere—have believed that this "short cut" is infused or mystical contemplation and have stated that therefore, according to St. Teresa, mystical contemplation is not required for the full perfection of Christian life. Actually, as the context shows, this "short cut" is only the suspension of the imagination and the memory or the beginning of ecstasy, which sometimes accompanies and forwards passive union, although it constitutes no part of it.

When St. Alphonsus, without referring to Cardinal Petrucci or Bernardo de Castelvetere, speaks personally and spontaneously about St. Teresa's mansions, he draws better distinctions than they do—because he himself experienced such things—between what essentially and formally constitutes the prayer of quiet and of union and what is merely concomitant and forms only secondary and accidental phenomena. In a way this distinction is indicated in *The Great Means of Prayer*, chap. 3, § 2 (II, 542), where St. Alphonsus takes up the commentary of Monsignor Palafox on the eighteenth letter of St. Teresa, a passage quoted by Father Keusch in his article in *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, pp. [200] ff.

saint previously remarked⁶¹ that the passive prayer of quiet often takes place without any sensible sweetness. How could it be proven that such prayer does not exist in the prolonged aridities through which perfect souls pass without abandoning prayer?

We notice, too, that when St. Alphonsus describes transforming union⁶² as St. Teresa presents it in her seventh mansions, he really gives such a complete description of the full perfection of Christian life that it seems unrealizable before this summit. He recalls that in this higher state a suspension of the powers no longer occurs and that they, being purified, thereafter are capable of divine union. But for them to have the capacity for union, they must pass through the passive purification of the senses and of the soul, a purification which ought, St. John of the Cross says,⁶³ to free us from the necessity of passing through purgatory. We pass through purgatory in fact only to expiate without meriting faults which we should have avoided or should have atoned for in this life while meriting. What St. Alphonsus describes surely seems to be the normal earthly prelude to the beatific vision, that is, a perfect proximate disposition to receive it immediately after death. The radical order of grace, let us not forget, would require that we receive the beatific vision as soon as we have drawn our last breath. This is why the separated soul suffers so much at being deprived of the vision of God in purgatory.⁶⁴ A careful reading of St. Alphonsus' text reveals that his description of transforming union follows St. Teresa's and presents it not as a grace in itself extraordinary, like prophetic

⁶¹ *Praxis*, no. 134.

⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 138.

⁶³ *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 20.

⁶⁴ This point is developed in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 362 ff.

revelations or miracles, but the summit, the high and rarely attained but normal development, of the life of grace. In other words, just as the saints achieve that high perfection in which sanctity consists while on earth, so do they enter into that union with God which serves in this life as the normal prelude to the life of heaven.⁶⁵

(2) If we grant this as true, how does it happen that St. Alphonsus says a little previously in no. 136 of the *Praxis* that passive union forms no necessary requirement for perfection and that active union suffices for it? He reproduces here, as he expressly states, Cardinal Petrucci's ideas, and, as a matter of fact, active union is sufficient for a certain degree of perfection. But is it enough to bring us to perfect detachment from creatures and from self? Is it enough to lead us to the end which St. Alphonsus holds out to us all saying: "The sum of perfection lies in conformity to God's will: it must be entire and without reserve, unwavering and irrevocable. All our perfection consists in this; I repeat it, all our actions, desires, and prayers must tend to this end."⁶⁶

When spontaneously expressing his own thought and not quoting from the theologians of his own day like Cardinal Petrucci or Bernardo del Castelvetero, St. Alphonsus far outdistances them and overtakes St. John of the Cross, whose thought and authority, needless to add, far surpasses theirs. He says, in agreement with the author of *The Dark Night*, that true Christian perfection cannot exist without great docility to the lights and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, characteristic of the illuminative and unitive ways. However short a time they may last, they introduce the soul into a passive

⁶⁵ *Praxis*, chap. 9, no. 138.

⁶⁶ *Conformity to the Will of God*, chap. 1.

state, at least for a few minutes, whether it is a state of aridity and purgation or of consolation. To obtain a clear idea of St. Alphonsus' position, we need only read his novena to the Holy Ghost.⁶⁷

These texts and others like them show that, according to the mind of the saint, the full perfection of Christian life demands a stronger unifying principle than acquired union can supply. The reason why is pointed out by St. Thomas when showing the necessity for the gifts of the Holy Ghost and their connection with charity:

But in matters directed to the supernatural end, to which man's reason moves him, according as it is, in a manner, and imperfectly, informed by the theological virtues, the motion of reason does not suffice, unless it receive in addition the prompting or motion of the Holy Ghost, according to Rom. 8:14, 17: "Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . and if sons, heirs also": and Ps. 142: "Thy good Spirit shall lead me into the right land," because, to wit, none can receive the inheritance of that land of the Blessed, except he be moved and led thither by the Holy Ghost. Therefore, in order to accomplish this end, it is necessary for man to have the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁶⁸

"Whether we consider human reason as perfected in its natural perfection, or as perfected by the theological virtues, it does not know all things. Consequently it is unable to avoid folly and other like things mentioned in the objection. God, however, to whose knowledge and power all things are subject, by His motion safeguards us from all folly, ignorance, dullness of mind, and hardness of heart, and the rest. Con-

⁶⁷ *Opere*, ed. cit., pp. 395 ff.; *Medit.* 3.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 2. The doctrine is developed in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 278-80.

sequently the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which make us amenable to His promptings, are said to be given as remedies to these defects."⁶⁹ The gifts are necessary for salvation as habitual dispositions to receive God's inspirations readily and docilely, just as the moral virtues serve to render the sensuous appetency and the will docile to the direction of prudence.

Because the seven gifts are connected with charity, which unites us to the Holy Ghost,⁷⁰ they form part of the spiritual organism and grow together with it, as the five fingers and the hand develop together.⁷¹ It would be inconceivable for a just man to have a high degree of charity without having a corresponding degree of the gifts of wisdom and understanding connected with this virtue. Now the Holy Ghost usually moves souls according to their supernatural dispositions, unless some accidental obstacle prevents it. Every soul with a high degree of charity therefore normally receives contemplation of the mysteries of faith. The form it takes may be evident and sometimes striking or diffuse but very real, giving a truly supernatural tone to the life of the soul and manifesting the soul as indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Without contemplation saints dedicated to the active life, such as St. Vincent de Paul, would not have continually beheld the sick poor and abandoned children as suffering members of Christ. Without it we cannot begin to fathom the infinite value of the Sacrifice of the Mass or live sufficiently by the solemn moment of Eucharistic consecration. Now all

⁶⁹ 1a IIac, q. 68, a. 2, ad 3um.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 5.

⁷¹ 1a IIac, q. 66, a. 2.

Christians are called to live, and live deeply, by it, that they may have life more abundantly, even as all men are called to the beatific vision of the very essence of God, although many woefully neglect their salvation. St. Alphonsus certainly denies none of these Thomistic principles but, as we see from his *nóvena* to the Holy Ghost, teaches them to all interior souls, thus far surpassing certain mystical theologians of his own time, whom he found useful to quote but whom our own times no longer remember.

(3) When reproducing the statements of these theologians, St. Alphonsus comments in passing that souls in a passive state acquire no merit because they do nothing but simply receive.⁷² Later, when speaking for himself, he has something else to say that conforms to St. Teresa's thought: "In the (passive) prayer of quiet, the will is as if bound, for it cannot love any other object than God, who attracts it to Himself."⁷³ In this passive state, therefore, the soul is acting, it is freely loving God, and, as a result, meriting. St. Teresa, when speaking of a more passive state of union, says the same thing: "Here God allows us nothing else but the concurrence of an entirely submissive will,"⁷⁴—which merits by its docility. According to St. Thomas and all his disciples, the will's docility to the Holy Ghost makes the acts of the seven gifts meritorious. No doubt they are not, properly speaking, deliberate acts, like those reached by discursive deliberation and ruled by prudence under the inspiration of the gift of counsel. Acts of the gift of piety, for example, are above human deliberation and yet are vital, free, and meri-

⁷² No. 127. Likewise *Haeresum historia et confutatio*, *Confut.* XIV, *De Michaelis Molinos haeresi*, no. 3.

⁷³ *Praxis*, no. 134.

⁷⁴ *Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansion, chap. 1.

torious, and, when they last some time, are called passive states.⁷⁵

We see then that, when St. Alphonsus denies merit to passive states and holds passive union unnecessary for perfection, he utters the opinion of certain theologians of his own time rather than his own deep thought, so much more like that of St. Thomas and of St. John of the Cross. He would certainly not deny the statement from the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* that "the more intense charity a soul has, the more the Holy Ghost enlightens it and communicates His gifts to it,"⁷⁶ These gifts are, in fact, as St. Thomas says,⁷⁷ connected with charity, and all the infused *habitus*, like the different parts of a spiritual organism, grow together.⁷⁸ Nothing in St. Alphonsus' writings contradicts these principles; rather, everything that he tells us of the Holy Ghost and of the increase of charity repeatedly confirms them.

The objection still arises that Benedict XIV, using the words of Cardinal de Laurea, has written: "Many servants of God have been canonized without any mention, in their process of canonization, of infused contemplation; it is sufficient to prove the heroism of their virtues, confirmed by miracles."⁷⁹ The objection is easily met, for Benedict XIV was not talking from a theological point of view with the intention of describing what normally belongs to the full

⁷⁵ The subject has been developed elsewhere at length, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 281 f., for the continual necessity of greater and greater docility to the Holy Ghost; pp. 285-98, for a comparison of the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost with common actual grace.

⁷⁶ *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 29.

⁷⁷ Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 5.

⁷⁸ Ia IIae, q. 66, a. 2.

⁷⁹ *De servorum Dei beatificatione . . .*, Bk. III, chap. 26.

perfection of Christian life; he was speaking rather from a juridical point of view, stating that in the process of beatification nothing need be examined but the heroic character of the virtues and the miracles confirming it: that is certain. However, can heroic virtue exist without the activity of the gifts of the Holy Ghost? We know St. Thomas' response to the question and what St. John of the Cross has to say when reproducing the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great.⁸⁰ Now the activity of the gifts of understanding, of wisdom, and of piety takes place chiefly in prayer, which, when dominated by their influence, is called infused.

Besides, in almost every process of canonization, when the demonstration of the saints' heroic faith and hope makes reference to their interior trials, these are nothing else but the passive purifications so clearly analyzed by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night*. They are certainly not graces *gratis datae*, extraordinary gifts like prophecy, but they constitute a grievous passive state, marked by a high degree of contemplation of God's infinite majesty together with a deep recognition of our misery, knowledge such as only the Holy Ghost can give. For example, when we read the chapter in the life of the Curé of Ars about his interior trials, we find expressed in terms within the reach of all, what St. John of the Cross has to say of the night of the soul.

Finally, Benedict XIV, when speaking of mystical questions, reproduces word for word Cardinal de Laurea's work, *De oratione christiana*. This author, when speaking not from a juridical but from a theological point of view, tells us: "It is permissible to desire mystical union, usually given by God

⁸⁰ Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 5.

to the perfect with infused contemplation."⁸¹ His presentation here belongs to traditional teaching as commonly formulated by Dominican and Carmelite Thomists.⁸²

Father Keusch, at the end of his article, is kind enough to say of *La vie spirituelle*: "We believe that it correctly outlines the theory of the sublime ways to heaven" and adds that practically "the shortness and difficulty of life, the vehemence of concupiscence, and original sin with all its consequences . . . these are the facts that struck St. Alphonsus."⁸³ Original sin and its results certainly make the realization of the ideal difficult. St. Augustine is the first to say so when combating the Pelagians. Nevertheless, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount he speaks to all Christians about what the full development of charity and of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost should be in them. Opposed as the evangelical beatitudes are to all the maxims of human wisdom, our Lord preached them to all.

If the founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer has taken full account of the consequences of original sin, he also bears as his motto the words *Copiosa apud eum redemptio* and he loved to quote St. Paul to the Romans 5: 20: "And where sin abounded, grace did more abound," a passage he explains in the same way as St. Thomas does in his beautiful commentary in the *Summa*.⁸⁴ St. Paul also told the Ephesians: "Wherefore I also . . . cease not to give thanks for you, making commemoration of you in my prayers, that

⁸¹ Laurentius Brancati, Card. De Laurea, *De oratione christiana*, Opusc. VII, chap. 10; Opusc. VIII, chap. 9.

⁸² Vallgornera, *Mystica theologia S. Thomae*, q. 3, d. 3, a. 3, no. 430; Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Summa theol. myst.*, ed. 1874, II, 299; III, 43.

⁸³ *La vie spirituelle*, June, 1927, p. [209].

⁸⁴ Cf. St. Thomas in *Ep. ad Rom.* 5: 20; also *Summa*, IIIa, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3um.

the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what the hope is of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us, who believe according to the operation of the might of His power."⁸⁵ Such is indeed the great doctrine preserved by St. Alphonsus in his treatment of the triumph of charity in souls.⁸⁶

If our wounded nature falls far below the perfection which our nature had when it was gifted with integrity, as it existed in the state of innocence, yet the Son of God made man, the new Adam, is infinitely above the first Adam; and Mary, the new Eve, is incomparably more perfect than the first Eve. The Eucharistic worship taking place in the smallest country church, especially at the moment of consecration, infinitely surpasses the worship that went on in the Garden of Paradise. Really faithful and generous souls never lack for graces but continually receive more. Jesus Christ our Mediator and Mary our mediatrix will lead them, through increasingly fervent Communion, to a union with God no less intimate than that which man knew in the state of original justice, although now this union is often accompanied by hard purgation, which serves, moreover, as a means of increased merit. With this in mind, St. Paul tells us, "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."⁸⁷

If St. Alphonsus in no way disparages the results of original

⁸⁵ Eph. 1: 18.

⁸⁶ *Reflections*, § 13.

⁸⁷ II Cor. 7: 4.

sin, he believes no less in baptismal regeneration and in everything which it contains in germ: *gratia, semen gloriae*. Like his guide, St. Thomas, he teaches that the grace of the virtues and of the gifts develops in such a way as to dispose the soul through purgation for the beatific vision, being wholly ordered to that end. Through the power of the Redeemer then practice catches up with the great doctrinal principles, and the real rises by degrees to the level of the ideal, once glimpsed from afar off. We believe that St. Alphonsus subscribed entirely to the assertion of the author of *The Imitation* that: "If there are few contemplatives, the reason lies in the fact that few know how to detach themselves wholly from creatures and from all temporal things."⁸⁸

St. Alphonsus tells us this earlier in the "Reflections"⁸⁹ when explaining St. Teresa's statement: "Detach your heart from creatures, then seek God, and you will find Him." He says, "You will not always obtain spiritual consolations, for the Lord does not give them continually to those who love Him. . . . But He does make them experience an interior peace that surpasses all understanding, *quae exsuperat omnem sensum*. O how good God is to those who seek Him only!"⁹⁰

The peace that He gives, *quae exsuperat omnem sensum*, constitutes the blessedness of peacemakers promised by our Lord to all generous souls; and, as both St. Augustine⁹¹ and St. Thomas⁹² show, this beatitude corresponds to the gift of wisdom, which makes us in some way see all the events of

⁸⁸ *Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 31.

⁸⁹ *Reflections*, chap. 13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 41.

⁹¹ *Lib. I de serm. Domini in monte*, chap. 4.

⁹² *Ila Ilae*, q. 45, a. 6.

life through God's eyes rather than with our own, whether these events are pleasant or unpleasant and even if they surprise and baffle us. A practical and lofty contemplation gives deep direction to the activity of life just because it comes to us from on high; in the words of St. Thomas, "Wisdom as a gift is not merely speculative but practical."⁹³ Just because it outdistances natural wisdom, the gift of wisdom extends to conduct and directs action. "The higher a virtue is, the greater the number of things to which it extends."⁹⁴

A very interesting work remains to be done, we think, one that should tempt Father Keusch to complete his work on the ascetical doctrine of St. Alphonsus. It would consist in doing research on the saint's spiritual work to bring out his ideas on the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, the increase of charity, the seven gifts, and the perfect divine union attained by complete detachment from creatures.

Far from denying the connection between charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost so plainly asserted by St. Thomas,⁹⁵ St. Alphonsus expresses what is equivalent to the same thing in different places in his works, for example, in the novena to the Holy Ghost.⁹⁶ There he shows that the love of charity is not simply a fire but also a light that illumines, a living water that refreshes, a power that grows, an unction that consecrates our souls as temples for the increasingly intimate abiding of the Holy Ghost.⁹⁷ On this subject he quotes the scriptural texts in which St. Augustine and St. Thomas found

⁹³ *Ila Ilae*, q. 45, a. 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ad rum.

⁹⁵ *Ia Ilae*, q. 68, a. 5.

⁹⁶ *Opere*, ed. cit., II, 393.

⁹⁷ We should note however that from the moment of justification or conversion the act of loving God precedes the act of hating sin, since sin is hated because it is displeasing to God.

the doctrine of the seven gifts and of their relationship with charity.

A work of this kind would be a useful contribution to mystical studies. It would show, we believe, that the spirituality of St. Alphonsus in no way runs counter to the doctrine here set forth according to Thomistic principles. It would make it possible for people to see that the saint's great prudence led him in no way whatever to reduce the height of the end to which all interior souls should aspire, but reminds us that, although this end is first in the order of intention it is last in the order of execution, and we must begin our spiritual edifice with a foundation of humility, mortification, and obedience, and by the practice of solid virtue. Although men never begin cathedrals with the arches, an architect must have from the very beginning a plan for the whole building, arches and all, since the foundation must be made with its height in mind.

Not only do we believe in a real harmony between the doctrine of *La vie spirituelle* and St. Alphonsus' spirituality, but we consider the reading of his works very useful as a practical completion to the great speculative views to which St. Thomas accustoms us. St. Alphonsus shows how these should be reflected in the details of daily life; in the order of execution, he directs our steps toward the high ideal proposed to us all in the beatitudes preached by Christ at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount.⁹⁸ The beatitudes are nothing but the highest acts of the virtues and the gifts, the beginning, as it were, of eternal life in time, the end

⁹⁸ St. Thomas begins moral theology, Ia IIae, q. 1, by a study of our last end or the beatitude of heaven.

glimpsed while we are as yet afar off.⁹⁹ "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God": in a way pure hearts begin to see God in the penumbra of faith while still on earth¹⁰⁰ and the more the light of life makes Him known to them the more they love Him, completely fulfilling the demands of the great commandment to love God "with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ia IIae, q. 69, a. 1, 2.

¹⁰⁰ IIa IIae, q. 8, a. 3, 7.

¹⁰¹ Luke 10: 27.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNITY AND SUBLIMITY OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE: A SYNTHESIS OF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION

"For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."

II Cor. 3:6

"The work of the active life is twofold. One proceeds from the fullness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching. . . . The other work of the active life consists entirely in outward occupation, for instance, almsgiving, receiving guests."

Summa theol., IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6

Having dealt with the union of the purified soul with God and the contemplation presupposed by such union, we would now do well to discuss its fruits in the apostolic life as maintained in its unity and sublimity. To define purely contemplative religious life is an obviously less exacting task than to define the kind of life that unites both contemplation and apostolic activity. The difficulty here arises partly from the fact that the ideal of apostolic religious life is realized under quite a number of different forms, according to the place given to action. This place varies somewhat in the Carmelites, the Dominicans, and the sons of St. Francis, not to mention the older orders.

Nevertheless the difficulty we experience in defining the apostolic religious life, in grasping what really constitutes its spirit, arises chiefly from the fact that we are prone to materialize it, to stop short at the letter, at the multiplicity of somewhat tangible elements within it, without rising above these to its well-balanced unity, which alone can explain the true role of these different elements and give them life. Here is a case where we need to recall St. Paul's words: "Our sufficiency is from God. Who also hath made us fit ministers of the new testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."¹

When we have looked, as St. Thomas generally does, at the difficulty of the problem, we shall afterward be in a better position to understand the worth of its solution as the holy doctor gives it to us.

ARTICLE I

THE APOSTOLIC LIFE:

ITS DIFFICULTY AND SUPERIORITY

As higher organisms have many clearly differentiated but convergent functions, so the apostolic or mixed life is obviously more complex than the purely contemplative life of the Carthusians and the active life of the hospitalers. Precisely this complexity makes the apostolic life particularly difficult. In religious orders like St. Dominic's, St. Francis', the Carmelites, the Premonstratensians, and others, monastic observances such as fasting and abstinence, night watches, the deep study of philosophy and theology, integral liturgical prayer, that is, the Divine Office chorally recited, and finally,

¹ II Cor. 3: 6.

the apostolate through oral or written teaching and preaching, all find a place.

If one of these elements is overstressed, the harmony of the apostolic life is endangered; there occurs hypertrophy of one organ and atrophy of another, a lack of balance of functions, and consequently more or less serious disorder. Every evidence points to the necessity of maintaining a close unity in such diversity. Unity is breath to this life; when it is lost, all is lost. The mixed life disintegrates into its various elements and perishes. Substitutes resembling it take its place but have not its high nature. Sometimes we hear people say that the old orders have had their day. If they have remained faithful to the ideals of the saints who founded them, how can this be true?

If we lose sight of that higher unity which is the very soul of apostolic life, some of us come to think that monastic observances harm study; others consider that deep study works against proper monastic observance. We even manage to establish an apparent opposition between study and preaching. Some romantic preachers depreciate philosophical and theological teaching as too abstract and lifeless: "baseless, formless, alright for the classroom." On the other hand, we find men of learning occupied in patient historical and critical research who belittle preaching, looking upon it as something superficial and meaningless. In one way or another what constitutes the life of all great apostles is forgotten. Men of deep meditation, prayer, true contemplatives, the Pauls and Dominics of every age, have given to other souls for their salvation, their own living contemplation of God and of Christ.

Blessed Henry Suso in his *Book of Eternal Wisdom* clearly

points out how the spiritual life is only too frequently materialized by two opponent groups, the one devoting themselves almost exclusively to study, and the other to observances and austerities; he makes no allusion to those who give themselves entirely to the externals of the apostolate or to natural, and largely unsanctified, activity.

The disciple desired to know if somewhere a man might not exist who had reached the noble height of renouncement (about which the Truth had spoken to him), a man really transformed into Christ; and he desired that God would make this man known to him so that he might speak familiarly with him. And as the disciple was thinking seriously of this, he was lifted out of himself and taken into a country where the senses cannot go. There he beheld an image hanging between heaven and earth, the image of a man whose look was full of goodness though he was held fast to a cross. And the disciple saw ranged about the cross yet unable to draw near to it two classes of people. One of these saw the image interiorly but not exteriorly; the others exteriorly but not interiorly. . . . Oh! Eternal Truth, said the disciple, tell me the meaning of this marvellous vision.

And a voice answered him interiorly saying: The image which you have seen represents the only Son of God, inasmuch as He has taken upon Himself our human nature. You saw but one image and yet it was diversified and multiplied, representing as it does all the men who are His members and, through Him and in Him, sons of God. The Head rules the many members of the one body. He is the first born by reason of His assumption into the Divine Person; the others, on the contrary, become sons only in so far as they are transformed in union with this image. The cross signifies that a man who has really renounced himself ought always to live interiorly as well as exteriorly, in complete abnegation, accepting all that God wills him to suffer, no matter from

whence it comes, dying to himself and being ready to take anything for the glory of our Heavenly Father. Such men are noble within and on guard without.

Those who see this image interiorly but not exteriorly merely reason about the life of Christ, considering it only speculatively but not practically, failing to mortify their nature by imitating this image. They think of it but afterwards give themselves up to their natural tendencies and false liberty, deeming those of a different outlook than themselves as narrow and unintelligent men.

Those who consider this image exteriorly but not interiorly, seem hard and severe. They perform penitential exercises, live circumspectly, and enact before men a kind of honorable and holy life, but neglect the interior consideration of Christ, Whose life was sweet and lovable. They are absolutely unlike the model which they themselves propose. . . . Self will remains, preserved to such a degree that they never come to possess the divine virtues of obedience, patience, submissiveness, and others of like character which make men conformable to the image of Christ.²

Blessed Henry Suso then understood why "these two kinds of people stood about the cross but would not approach it." He understood much better than he had before, that "God has given the potentiality and the power to become the sons of God only to those who are born of God. . . . The man who has renounced himself, who has God alone as his father, sees nothing temporal purely in its temporality but looks upon and understands all things in God."³ The "opened eyes" with which he regards everything get their sight from the contemplation of revealed mysteries, a contemplation superior to the exterior practices of penance and

² Part III, chap. 5.

³ Fr. tr. Thiriot, *Œuvres mystiques du Bx. H. Suso* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1899), II, 233 ff.

to mere study. It ought to be, together with the love of God, the soul of the apostolate. This truth can become more evident to us if we consider the genuine purpose of religious life, ordered not to personal sanctification alone but to the salvation of souls as well.

ARTICLE II

THE SPECIAL END OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

To see more clearly what should be the relationship between the different elements of the religious life, particularly in the case of the orders already mentioned, we need to ask ourselves what is their special end, since the end, the reason for which the means exist, is first in the order of intention, although last in the order of execution.

As an answer to the problem, we have St. Thomas' remark that preaching the great mysteries of faith ought to flow from the contemplation of these divine mysteries, "*ex plenitudine contemplationis, derivatur.*" This serves as the principle of his response: "It is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate. . . . Accordingly the highest place in religious orders is held by those which are directed to teaching and preaching, which, moreover, are nearest to the episcopal perfection. . . . The second place belongs to those which are directed to contemplation, and the third to those which are occupied with external actions."⁴ In other words, the apostle, like Jesus Christ and the Twelve, should be a contemplative, passing on his contemplation to others in order to save and sanctify them. St. Thomas' words expressing the particular end of religious

⁴ IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6.

life dedicated to the apostolate have become the motto of his Order: *Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*: to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation.

But how are these words to be understood? Three interpretations are proposed, plainly corresponding to three different mentalities, each more or less aware of its own spirit. The Carmelites of Salamanca⁵ set them down as follows:

According to the first interpretation, reminiscent of some views expressed by Suarez, the mixed or apostolic life tends equally to contemplation and to action, as to two principal and immediate ends, *ex aequo*.

According to the second interpretation, a more or less conscious opinion of many preachers, the mixed or apostolic religious life has apostolic action for its primary and principal end, but it also tends toward some sort of contemplation as a means necessary to action.

The third interpretation gives us a much loftier view, holding that the mixed or apostolic religious life tends, on the contrary, principally and primarily to that contemplation and union with God which it implies and secondarily to action, an effect of the apostle's own contemplation and a possible means of disposing his hearers in their turn for the contemplation of divine things and for union with God.

We need now to evaluate these three interpretations, so strikingly different in spirit. From St. Thomas' point of view, the first cannot be admitted. The mixed or apostolic life cannot tend to contemplation and to action, as to two principal and immediate ends *ex aequo*. The notion of two entirely adequate ends, neither of which would be subordinate to the other implies a duality without subordination and there-

⁵ *Cursus theologicus*, tr. XX, de statu religioso, disp. II, dub. 3, no. 29.

fore the destruction of unity in religious life. Action and contemplation sought as two principal and immediate ends would be prejudicial to each other. Finally, a choice between them would have to be made. The hound cannot chase two rabbits at once.

The second interpretation is no more admissible. If in fact the mixed life has action for its primary and principal end and tends to contemplation only as a means to action, nothing remains to distinguish it from the active religious life, which also ought to give some place to prayer in order that the corporal works of mercy may be exercised in a supernatural manner. Besides, contemplation and union with God cannot conceivably be made a means subordinated to action, for they are greater than action. Obviously this life can hold nothing higher than union with God through contemplation and love.⁶ As a result, apostolic action has real worth only so far as it stems from this source, in no way a subordinate means to it but its eminent cause. Moreover, apostolic action itself is a means subordinated to divine union, for the purpose of the apostle is to lead souls to union with God. The order of agents corresponds to the order of ends: "*Ordo agentium debet correspondere ordini finium.*"⁷ The apostle seeks to lead others to divine union, and his own union with God serves to bring them to share the same divine gift and to be saved.

The third interpretation holds that the mixed or apostolic life tends primarily and principally toward contemplation and union with God, not stopping there as the purely contemplative life does, but flowing over into apostolic action,

⁶ Ia IIae, q. 182, a. 1; *ibid.*, ad 3um.

⁷ Ia IIae, q. 109, a. 6.

preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and spiritual direction.⁸ The Carmelites of Salamanca expressed their view in this wise, and the Dominican Passerini followed Blessed Humbert of Rome⁹ in holding the same opinion: "The mixed or apostolic life has as its principal end contemplation or union with God, a source of fruitfulness for the salvation of souls."¹⁰

St. Thomas clearly took the same position when he said that theological teaching and preaching are works of the active life but ought to overflow from the fullness of contemplation if they are to bear fruit.¹¹ He adds that our Lord Jesus Christ was not content to limit Himself to a purely contemplative life but chose one that presupposed abundant contemplation and shared it with souls through preaching.¹² St. Thomas puts it this way: "For it is becoming to that kind of life, which we hold Christ to have embraced, wherein a man delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, that he devote himself first of all to contemplation, and that he afterward come down to the publicity of active life by associating with other men."¹³

⁸ Salmanticenses, *loc. cit.*

⁹ *Lettre sur les trois vœux et explication de la Règle de saint Augustin*, chap. 5, on prayer.

¹⁰ *De hominum statibus*, in *IIa IIae*, q. 188, a. 6.

¹¹ *IIa IIae*, q. 188, a. 6. St. Thomas makes no denial that in the purely contemplative life, that of Chartreux for example, there is a virtual and hidden apostolate, a profound influence on souls through prayer and immolation; the solitary in this way reaches souls in Christ, in whom he regards them, and can obtain for them great graces of conversion and sanctification. But the hidden apostolate of prayer and immolation is to be found in the apostle also, in St. Paul and St. Dominic, and they have the apostolate properly so called as well, which, if it does not add to the intensity of their contemplation and union with God, is an extension and visible reflection of it. Christ's life is more complete with His preaching of the gospel than it would have been without it.

¹² *IIIa*, q. 40, a. 1, ad 2um.

¹³ *Ibid.*, a. 2, ad 3um.

Disciples of St. Thomas have even pointed out that the relationship of contemplation and union with God to the apostolic life bears a likeness to the relationship of the Incarnation to Redemption. The Incarnation, the hypostatic union of the human nature of Christ with the uncreated person of the Word, is not ordered to our redemption as a means to a higher end, but as an eminent cause to an inferior effect. St. Thomas tells us: "God loves Christ not only more than He loves the whole human race, but more than He loves the entire created universe: because He willed for Him the greater good in giving Him *a name that is above all names*, so far as He was true God. Nor did anything of His excellence diminish when God delivered Him up to death for the salvation of the human race; rather did He become thereby a glorious conqueror: *The government was placed upon His shoulder*, according to Isa. 9: 6."¹⁴

From all eternity, by the formal motive of mercy,¹⁵ God has willed not an Incarnation subordinated to the Redemption, as a means to a higher end, but the redemptive Incarnation, in view of which He permitted the sin of the first man.¹⁶ Similarly, the purpose of an order dedicated to the mixed or apostolic life is not the apostolate, with contemplation subordinated to it as to a higher end, but contemplation becoming fruitful in the apostolate.

The view here expressed conforms, moreover, to the Church's habit of making a distinction in the constitutions of religious orders between their primary and principal end: religious perfection, union with God by the spirit of faith and

¹⁴ *Ia*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 1um.

¹⁵ *IIa IIae*, q. 30, a. 1.

¹⁶ *IIIa*, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3um.

charity, the end to which the three virtues and vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are subordinated; and the secondary or derivative end: one or other of the works of mercy.

Only St. Thomas' doctrine clearly shows the unity and sublimity of the apostolic life. He brings out plainly how the apostolate must have contemplation as its source. Then the good news of the gospel is preached in an enlightening, living, simple, and penetrating way, with unction to draw hearts and deep conviction to win them.¹⁷ An apostolic order can then be said to have a unique end, contemplation bearing fruit in the apostolate.

Apostolic work, preaching, when they well up from the contemplation of divine things, give not only the letter but the spirit of the word of God, of supernatural mysteries, the commandments, and the counsels. The letter of the gospel can be easily known and even easily preached in a literary fashion. The conclusions of moral theology as expounded in most manuals can also be stated with a little application. What the faithful demand of a preacher, however, is the soul of things, that breath and supernatural flame, altogether different from romantic lyricism, which burns with the brief blaze of straw quickly set on fire and just as quickly turns to ashes. The breath of any apostolate, of preaching, should be the breath of divine truth, a great spirit of faith, of trust, of essentially supernatural love, putting the accent where it belongs on the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption, the Eucharist, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, eternal life begun on earth and consummated in heaven.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ila Ilac*, q. 177, a. 1.

As St. Paul says, God is indeed our sufficiency, making us fit ministers of the new testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit, the letter bringing death but the spirit giving life. "Our sufficiency is from God. Who also hath made us fit ministers of the new testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth." "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us."¹⁸ Here St. Paul is telling us of infused contemplation of revealed mysteries, which bears good fruit in the apostolate.

The letter of the Old Law, St. Thomas remarks,¹⁹ made known what we must do to avoid sin but put no check on concupiscence, and wrought no justification in men like the New Law, which is, more than anything else, spirit and charity poured forth in our hearts. The letter of the Old Law even in a sense provided an occasion for sin, because concupiscence moves with more ardor after forbidden pleasures; and the knowledge that we are forbidden to do something which we continue to covet will kill us, if we deviate from righteousness to follow our inclinations. In fact, to sin at the same time against the natural law and the written law is a more serious matter than to sin only against the former. In this sense the letter of the Old Law occasionally did work death; not that it was bad, for it forbade evil; but because it was imperfect; for it failed to remove the cause of evil. Law, without the spirit engraven in men's hearts, is an occasion

¹⁸ II Cor. 3: 6; 4: 6 f.

¹⁹ *In II ad Cor.* 3: 6.

for death. We need to receive that law which is spirit and life and pours forth charity into our hearts.²⁰

To grasp what the preaching of the gospel should be like, we must recall, as St. Thomas says,²¹ that the New Law is only secondarily a written law, but above and before all a law infused into men's souls.

Now that which is preponderant in the law of the New Testament, and whereon all its efficacy is based, is the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ (Rom. 7:2). *The law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and of death. . . .* Nevertheless the New Law contains certain things that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Ghost, and pertaining to the use of that grace: such things are of secondary importance, so to speak, in the New Law; and the faithful needed to be instructed concerning them, both by word and writing, both as to what they should believe and as to what they should do.²²

The preaching of the gospel ought therefore above all to be spirit and life; that is, it should spring from contemplation of the mysteries of salvation in order that the faithful may truly live by them. The apostle carries the light of contemplation in a fragile vessel "that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us." Had our Lord's apostles been rich, powerful, of noble blood, all the great things they did would have been attributed to them and not to God. Therefore St. Paul adds: "In all things we suffer tribulation,

²⁰ As St. Thomas observes (Ia IIae, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3um), those in the state of grace in the time of the Old Testament had divine life in their hearts, and under this title already belonged in a sense to the New Testament, for they possessed sanctifying grace by having at least implicit faith in the Christ to come.

²¹ Ia IIae, q. 106, a. 1.

²² *Ibid.*

but are not distressed; we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not: always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh."²³ In a sense, this carrying of Christ's death in other mortal flesh always continues in the life of the persecuted Church; and while Jesus promised a hundredfold to those who would follow Him, He also foretold persecution.²⁴

Many more people than we realize expect those who preach the gospel to have an even greater hunger and thirst for justice than their own. Supernatural hunger and thirst far surpass any kind of passing enthusiasm and endure through the frequent setbacks of the apostolate only because of the gift of fortitude, corresponding, as St. Augustine and St. Thomas point out, to the evangelical beatitude: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice."²⁵ The gift of fortitude, united to the doctrine of faith and the fire of charity, indeed makes athletes of the faith, as preachers should be. More people than we surmise look for this in those who bring the word of God to them.

We must understand that the apostolic life is not only an exact mean between two extremes toward which youth deviates by turns, first to a dried-up scientific attitude and then to a lyric approach without doctrinal foundation. The just mean is a summit, a culminating point, the great peak of living divine truth, which constitutes the soul of the perfect

²³ II Cor. 4: 8-11.

²⁴ Mark 10: 30.

²⁵ IIa IIae, q. 139, a. 2.

mean, somewhat in the same way that charity animates or informs the moral virtues and lifts them above mediocrity or lukewarmness.

Those true apostles whom the Church has raised to her altars attained this end. Their words recall the *Verbum spirans amorem*, the Word from which Love proceeds, really reflecting for us the inner life of God. In them we see the special end of the apostolic life, contemplative and at the same time active.

ARTICLE III

THE ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN APOSTOLIC ORDERS

To attain its end an apostolic order should neglect none of the elements of formation determined by its divinely inspired founder, for to founders God has given an exceptional grace of state for the guidance of their children. These elements must be seen not only in themselves but especially in relation to the end to which they are ordered; from this point of view nothing is reckoned as of small moment in religious life. Things little in themselves become great because of their relationship to their end; just as the functioning of any cell in an organism cannot be unimportant to it.

From this vantage point we see that all the elements of apostolic religious life are ordered in an ascending and balanced harmony: (1) regular observance, (2) study, (3) well-performed liturgical prayer leading to contemplation and union with God and then overflowing into (4) apostolic action. This life rises nearer and nearer to God to reach divine intimacy and then flows back to souls to save and sanctify

them by making them know and love the mystery of Christ, who will Himself lead them to the Father.

A glance at the different elements of this life as lived in the orders of St. Dominic, St. Francis, and of Carmel, will serve to convince us of this. Regular observances, long or total abstinence, fasting, and night watches, have all been chosen by the founders of these orders in a spirit of penance or of immolation. He who can grasp their supernatural meaning sees them as a worship of adoration offered to God. The priest, especially if he has entered the religious state, ought to remember that, since he shares in the priesthood of Christ by the priestly character and by grace, he should also share in some measure in our Lord's state of victim. Since Christians are told to "take up their cross daily," priests particularly must heed this word, for they should work for the salvation of souls by the same means that our Lord Himself chose, self-immolation, as Father Lacordaire reminds us by his way of defining the priesthood: "The priesthood is the immolation of a man joined with the immolation of God."²⁶

When in one place or another the old orders give up saying the night office as determined by their founders, the Lord seems no longer to send them so many and such strong vocations, raising up new congregations which have in their rule an hour of nocturnal adoration, for prayer should be unceasing day and night. Regular observances, especially fasting and abstinence, plainly have less importance than study and prayer; but they serve religious orders as the bark serves the tree. Strip off the bark of any tree, even a vigorous

²⁶ "The priesthood is the immolation of a man added to the immolation of God, and he who is called to it feels in his heart the value and beauty of souls." Panegyric for Blessed Fourier.

one, and the sap no longer rises in it. The saints warn us that we cannot detract from our observances without losing something of our spirit. Suppression or marked relaxation of rules leads infallibly to relaxation of ideas and of life; and God, who inspired the rules, does not bless such decadence. If regular observances are suppressed or attenuated contrary to the will of an order's founder, inspired as he was by God, thought and life decline as well, losing their supernatural character of radiant contemplation in an effort to become more reasonable, more scientific, but no longer capable of communicating life or of responding to the deep needs of souls. We should not be astonished then if our times lack true preachers, if those who speak utter cold words, expounding their theories without touching hearts or moving wills, no longer talking of God in a way alive enough to move others to love Him. When life fails to remain on the heights with thought, thought soon descends to the level of life.

A second means for achieving the end of the apostolic life is study, especially the deep study of the word of God preserved in Holy Scripture and tradition, the study of philosophy, and of theology together with its related sciences. Here we find a twofold wisdom: one purely natural, philosophy; the other acquired too but rooted in infused faith, theology. These two acquired wisdoms ought not to remain in the apostolic soul without being related to infused wisdom, the highest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost received at baptism and given more abundantly at confirmation. For an apostle, study should be a way of hymning the glory of God, especially the study of the doctrine of grace as made known to us by our Lord, and by St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas: "Without Me you can do nothing." "If thou didst know the gift of God!"

We recall the place given to study in the ascending series described by St. Benedict in the forty-eighth chapter of his rule: "*lectio, cogitatio, studium, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio.*" St. Thomas received his first formation from the Benedictines and kept this gradation.²⁷ Although for him study may be more speculative, it always leads the faithful and generous soul to desire and to ask humbly for the higher light of contemplation. Theology with its complexity of theses never approximates the simplicity of faith. We can find a likeness to their relationship in the field of plane figures. Think of a polygon inscribed within a circle. The sides of the polygon could be increased to infinity, yet, no matter how small they were, they would never equal a single point, nor would the polygon ever come to overlie the circumference of the circle. Similarly, the best theology will never reach the wholly supernatural height of infused faith to be found in the smallest Christian child. Faith is to theology as Christ's sacerdotal prayer is to an Augustinian or Thomistic commentary upon it. We search in vain in this high and simple prayer for a major, a minor, and a conclusion. It describes the perfect circle of contemplation, always returning to the same idea, the better to enter into its meaning. It is a flash of light coming down from the height of heaven to illumine our minds, a treasure of a higher order, which discursive theology distributes to us in the coin of its conclusions, somewhat as the lower angels receive the lofty and simple contemplation of the higher angels by a greater number of more limited ideas.

Preaching, if it is to save souls, must not stop at theology but go on to the height of faith, reaching thus the spirit of revealed mysteries, of the commandments and counsels, by

²⁷ *Иа Иае*, q. 180, a. 3.

means of contemplation proceeding from infused faith and the gifts of understanding and wisdom. Seen from above, theology then shows itself a living science, indeed the most living of all sciences, "*scientia subalternata scientiae Dei et beatorum*," as St. Thomas says, a science subordinated to the science of God and of the blessed by the intermediary of living faith.²⁸ As the science of optics receives its principles from geometry, so theology receives its principles from God the revealer through infused faith. The principles which God contemplates in Himself and which the blessed in heaven see in Him we supernaturally believe, penetrating them by the gift of understanding, tasting and savoring them by the gift of wisdom. Then bookish formulas come to life, and study acts as a preparation for contemplation. The moving windlass described by St. Teresa now turns with ease and brings up the water necessary for the garden of our spirit.

Above regular observance and the work of study, stands liturgical prayer, if it is done well and with recollection; and beyond it, mental prayer; then above and beyond all, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. These, because of the union with God to be found in them, are the culminating point of the apostolic life. From this summit the great river of God's word should flow down in living preaching. For it to do so, we must live liturgical prayer; if, as it so often happens, we recite it hurriedly and mechanically, it ceases to be prayer and, performed in such a way by a community, can even become a serious obstacle to recollection and divine union. We believe that we are gaining time by hurrying, and we lose the best time of life, the time due the Lord, when, were we teachable, we would find breath, repose, and renewed energy for our souls.

²⁸ Ia, q. 1, a. 2.

We must live by mental prayer, too, observing the exterior and interior silence which it requires and conversing with God throughout the day. If, in the apostolic life, the daily hour given to mental prayer is omitted or not properly observed, the apostle runs a great risk of becoming, as St. Paul expressed it, sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Those who would preach without living liturgical and mental prayer are like travelers who like to talk about the view from the top of Mount Blanc without ever having made the climb. Anyone can run through a guidebook describing the panorama, but this glance cannot take the place of a real look over the glaciers. By dint of daily work, we find it no great difficulty to skim through the Bible, the works of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, but these books yield up their spirit only to those who read them by the same supernatural light in which they were thought out and written. Lacking this light, we see them as men beholding a beautiful stained glass window from the outside; we see and see not; if we would know its beauty we must go within.

The highest moment of an apostle's day should obviously be the celebration of holy Mass. The apostle is to be as another Christ to his fellow men, *sacerdos alter Christus*. When can he be more united to his Master than at the time of consecration? Then he becomes indeed one with Him, as His conscious and free instrument, pronouncing the substance-changing words: "This is My body." "This is the chalice of My blood." At that moment Christ, who offered Himself on the cross, continues to offer Himself through His minister.²⁹ In thus offering Himself, our Lord also offers His whole mystical body, especially those who follow His example in the supernatural endurance of suffering. Each of our Masses

²⁹ Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, chap. 2.

and Communion should be more fervent than the one before, because each should increase in us the grace of the virtues and of the gifts. Day by day the priest should grow in understanding of the mysterious sacrifice of the cross perpetuated in substance on the altar. Contemplation of this kind ought to become the very soul of apostolic preaching, related to it not as a subordinate means but as its eminent cause, the ever-flowing source of a mighty river. St. Thomas in no way exaggerates when he says that evangelical preaching ought to have its source in the fullness of contemplation: "*ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur.*"³⁰ And the word *fullness*, "*plenitudo*," has all the more significance because of the moderation that always marks the great doctor's style. Then, and then only, the preaching of the gospel gives both the letter and the spirit of the word of God in the measure of the soul's readiness and spiritual need.

Blessed Grignon de Montfort in his *Amour de la divine sagesse*³¹ says that eternal Wisdom gives to those who possess. It lights the capacity to express them. Then he goes on to add:

Our Lord's words to the apostles promise this: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay."³² How few preachers have the ineffable gift of speech and can say with St. Paul, "We speak the wisdom of God!"³³ For the most part, they express only the natural lights of their minds or information gathered from books but not what divine Wisdom makes them feel,³⁴ or rather, not the divine

³⁰ IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6.

³¹ Part I, chap. 6.

³² Luke 21: 15.

³³ I Cor. 2: 7.

³⁴ Wisd. 6: 15.

abundance communicated to them by Wisdom.³⁵ As a result, few conversions are wrought by the spoken word. If a preacher really received from Wisdom the gift of speech, his listeners could no more withstand his words than those who heard St. Stephen could resist the wisdom and spirit that spoke.³⁶ Whatever such a preacher would say would be uttered with so much sweetness and authority that his word could not return to him without effect.

Too often we run a great risk of lowering the apostolic ideal by reducing contemplation, the nourishment of the apostolate, to mere historical and theological study, considered as a means subordinate to preaching. This brings about a loss to the whole apostolic life because it implies the abandonment of any aspiration to reach its summit, where all its elements are unified, where preaching wells up and overflows in something akin to the fire of eloquence spoken of by the Psalmist. Not to aspire to the summit of the apostolic life means to neglect the one thing necessary, to dry up the river at its source.

If on the contrary we look at the apostolic life in the light of the principles formulated by St. Thomas, we see both its unity and its sublimity and we no longer say that regular observance harms study or that deep study interferes with a life of observance. We do not give ourselves to lifeless study while depreciating preaching, nor to wholly external activity while underestimating study. On the other hand, we stop materializing the elements of a life so rich and harmonious and we rediscover the sense of St. Paul's words, "The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth." We even rediscover it sufficiently to communicate it to others, according to St.

³⁵ Matt. 12: 34.

³⁶ Acts 6: 10.

Thomas' formula, "*Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*": to contemplate the mysteries of Christian faith deeply enough to have a living and radiant knowledge of them and to bring the light of God to others, that they may be sanctified and united to Him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF UNION

"Having therefore a great high priest that hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; let us hold fast our confession."

Heb. 4: 14

When we talk of the unitive way, or, for that matter, of the illuminative way, we find difficulty in expressing ourselves, because of the varied modes in which these ways occur. We often encounter them in an attenuated form, in which infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith remains latent. Their full normal development demands contemplation; but contemplation may manifest itself in more ways than one. In pure contemplatives it shows itself as clearly and evidently as a shaft of light; in the proficient and perfect dedicated to the apostolate and to action, in St. Vincent de Paul, for example, it has the character rather of diffused light, appearing in a form ordered more to action. Extraordinary graces, such as the revelations and visions described by St. Teresa, may or may not accompany the complete development of the illuminative and unitive ways. Favors of this kind are not at all necessary for the full flowering of infused contemplation and of union with God, as St. John of the Cross plainly shows.

This diversity of form makes any study of the illuminative and unitive ways difficult. To obviate the difficulty, we must imitate what the Church does in her liturgy, addressed, as it is, to us all. She sets before her children these two ways as she beholds them in our Lord and our Lady, the great mediators and great models for everybody. The liturgy places insistence on those mysteries in their lives which by their very nature enlighten all souls sincerely desirous of growing in God's love, whether they are especially dedicated to contemplation or to action.

Therefore we shall bring this work to a close by considering the life of union in relationship to the priesthood and kingship of Christ, His impeccable and exemplary liberty, and the fruitful sufferings of Mary our mediatrix. To bring out more clearly the bond between these truths and the life of union, we shall put special emphasis on their relationship to the Sacrifice of the Mass, the high point in our day, the time of all times most potent to unite us to God.

The revealed doctrine most capable of giving us some insight into the greatness of the Sacrifice of the Mass, is the priesthood of Christ. The great theologians of the thirteenth century, such as St. Thomas, antedated the Lutheran heresy on the Sacrifice of the Mass, and, as a result, have left us an incompletely developed teaching on the subject. As a compensation for this, they treated at length of Christ's priesthood, as revelation unfolds it for us in the Epistle to the Hebrews in texts of great beauty frequently commented upon by the Fathers. These texts contain doctrinal riches which serve to illuminate the Eucharistic sacrifice and give us a fuller understanding of the Council of Trent's solemn definition against the Lutherans: "In the divine sacrifice accom-

plished in the Mass, Christ, who offered Himself on the altar of the cross by shedding His blood for us, is offered in an unbloody manner. The same Victim is offered. The same Priest offers, '*idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio*'; He Himself made the offering on the cross, now He makes it through His ministers, only the manner of oblation differs."¹ It is the same sacrifice in substance, for both victim and priest are the same, although the offering is now made by Christ through His ministers.

To grasp something of the greatness, power, and influence of Christ's priesthood, we should first recall what the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us of its essential character and then think over how theology, particularly as expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas, develops this teaching.

ARTICLE I

CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The Epistle applies to our Lord's priesthood the great thoughts expressed by St. Paul in his epistles to the Romans, to the Corinthians, and to Timothy, about Christ the Redeemer, the universal Mediator, the Head of the Church, and the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation. "For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a redemption for all."²

The first part of the Epistle to the Hebrews purposes to show the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, over all the mediums used by

¹ Sess. XXII, chap. 2. Cf. Denzinger, no. 940.

² I Tim. 2: 5.

God to manifest Himself to men in the Old Testament. Jesus is here declared to be higher than the angels, Moses, and all the prophets and priests of the Old Law. This teaching shows us that the Epistle was well calculated to instruct recently converted Jews and to fortify them against the temptation to return to the rites of the Levitical priesthood. Let us underline the essential points of St. Paul's thought.

(1) Jesus is above the angels; they are only servants of God, but He is the Son of God by origin and by nature, the Creator and Master of all things: "For to which of the angels hath He said at any time: Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee? . . . But to which of the angels said He at any time: Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy enemies Thy footstool"?³ And He excels the angels in obedience. They are faithful bearers of God's words to men. How much more perfectly Jesus Christ became God's messenger, God's message!

He is higher than the angels not only because of the mysteries of His divine sonship and Incarnation, but also because of the Redemption, because He has suffered for love of us and His sufferings have an infinitely meritorious and satisfactory value. Abased during His earthly life, He is now crowned with glory because of His sufferings and death. "Wherefore it behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God, that He might be a propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that, wherein He Himself hath suffered and been tempted, He is able to succour them also that are tempted."⁴

³ Heb. 1: 5, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 17 f.

(2) Jesus is greater than Moses, for Moses, the greatest of the prophets, was no more than a servant, whereas Christ is the Master Builder and Head of the house of God. Let us not, therefore, imitate the unbelief and disobedience of the early Israelites toward Moses by our attitude toward Jesus Christ. He is leading us to another land of promise far greater than that pledged to the Israelites. Let us heed His voice: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁵ Moses stammered out the name of God; Jesus is the substantial Utterance, the eternal Word of God come down upon earth to save us, and our hearts' secrets lie revealed before His eyes.⁶

(3) Jesus is incomparably greater than the high priests of the Old Law. Three very understandable reasons make this clear to us. The high priests succeeded one another in office. Those claimed by death were succeeded by others who soon followed them into the shadows. But Christ continues forever and "hath an everlasting priesthood, whereby He is able to save forever them that come to God by Him; always living to make intercession for us."⁷

Then, too, whereas the priests of the Old Law had first to offer sacrifice for their own sins and then for the people's, Jesus is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," not for His own sake, but for ours, to be a fitting high priest for us.⁸

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4: 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4: 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7: 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7: 27.

Finally, the rites and sacrifices of Mosaic worship, though multiple, lacked efficacy of themselves, despite the external magnificence with which they were surrounded. The Old Law provided for a sacrifice for sin, suitable for penitents, a peace offering for purified souls to express their gratitude, and a holocaust or whole burnt offering to signify man's complete submission to God's sovereign law by offering Him as His due an act of perfect adoration.⁹ No less variety obtained in the matter of the sacrifice itself; doves, heifers, and the paschal lamb, a figure of the mysterious Lamb to come and take away the sins of the world, were all used. All these sacrifices had value only as figures of a unique sacrifice to be accomplished not in great exterior magnificence but in the perfect divestment of Golgotha. "But Christ, being come a high priest of the good things to come . . . neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption."¹⁰ "For Jesus is not entered into the holies made with hands, the patterns of the true: but into heaven itself, that He may appear now in the presence of God for us."¹¹

Unlike the sacrifices of the Old Law, multiple but ineffectual of themselves, Christ's sacrifice is unique and perfect. His offering began when He came into the world: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold I come . . . that I should do Thy will, O God."¹² This act of oblation has never ceased being offered in Christ's heart. Although He no longer merits in heaven, His offering

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 102, a. 3, ad 8um.

¹⁰ Heb. 9: 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9: 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10: 7.

always continues, for He never ceases to make intercession for us.¹³

The first lines of the Epistle to the Hebrews sum up this entire doctrine: "God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world. Who being the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power . . . sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high."¹⁴ We could not ask for a more telling assertion of the divinity of Jesus than this, spoken to the first generation of Christians as an accepted dogma and infinitely precious treasure of the new-born Church.

ARTICLE II

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

The teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews is cast into exact terminology by theological and particularly Thomistic teaching concerning the priesthood in general and the perfection proper to it. The priest's office is to act as mediator between God and men: offering to God the prayers of the people, sacrifice especially, as being the most perfect act of the virtue of religion; bringing the things of God to the people (*sacerdos sacra dans*) by preaching the light of truth, and, through the administration of the sacraments, dispensing the grace necessary to fulfill God's law.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7: 25; 9: 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 1-3.

¹⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 22, a. 1.

To accomplish the exterior and social worship due to God, the priestly mediation must both ascend to Him and descend from Him. Man, being composed of soul and body, owes God both interior and exterior worship, and living by nature in society, owes Him, too, social worship, God being no less the author and benefactor of human society than of our soul and body. We need the priest to bind into a single whole the prayers of all the people, to unify their acts of adoration, of praise, and of reparation, and to make up for the imperfection of the acts of the faithful. His sanctity, that is, his special consecration to the Lord for this purpose, makes him capable of offering the prayers of the people to God as an expression of their whole soul.

The priest is no less necessary to bring to the people the things of God, divine light and grace, without human alteration or adulteration, neither failing to differentiate between divine fire and poetic ardor, nor between sentimentality and piety. The priest should be indeed "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."¹⁶

The twofold priestly mediation takes place especially in sacrifice, the offering of the sacrifice forming the ascending mediation, and the sharing of the victim offered with the faithful by communion forming the descending mediation. Just as the priesthood constitutes the pre-eminent sacred function, so sacrifice, as its name indicates, forms the pre-eminent sacred action. Without sacrifice, no priesthood; without the priesthood, no sacrifice; for sacrifice supposes an offering priest and an offered victim. Why should there be an outward oblation and destruction or immolation? To express in a sensible way an inward oblation and immolation. Even the

¹⁶ Matt. 5: 13 f.

act of adoration expressed in genuflecting shows that we recognize, St. Thomas says, our weakness before God, bowing down before Him as an admission that of ourselves we are nothing, "*quasi profitentes nos nihil esse ex nobis.*"¹⁷

If a simple genuflection has such symbolism, the sacrifice of adoration most vividly expresses the same truth: that, even when innocent, creatures are nothing of themselves; that God alone is Being, He who is, and in comparison to Him we are not, "*Substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te.*"¹⁸ After creation, there was no more being than before, because infinite being already existed; after creation there were more beings, but no more being; more living things, but no more life; more minds, but no more wisdom, no more sanctity, no more love.

The great truth of God's infinite fullness can be expressed only in a negative fashion in this life, by speaking of the nothingness of creatures, by saying that there would be no less being and no less perfection if every creature were annihilated. And over this nothingness that we are, the sovereign dominion of God must be exercised, the stars paying Him the tribute of their obedience all unwittingly, but we, with knowledge and freedom. To express God's infinite greatness and sovereignty and our contrasting weakness and nothingness, man gives himself to God by offering Him something external in a certain way, annihilating it, as if to say: God alone is He who is; I am he who is not. This symbolic destruction thus hymns the infinite greatness of the Most High and forms a sacrifice of adoration, which would have existed even if man had never sinned.

¹⁷ IIa IIae, q. 84, a. 2, ad 2um.

¹⁸ Ps. 38: 6.

The recognition of God's sovereign dominion ought to be accompanied by an act of thanksgiving for all we have received from Him; to benefactors we offer the best that we have to give in order to express our gratitude to them. By sacrifice man also asks new graces of God to secure perseverance in goodness. Even before sin, the triple sacrifice of adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication was due to God in virtue of the natural law, which regulates the relations of creatures to their Creator.¹⁹

After mortal sin, especially since it has affected the whole human race, man ought not only to recognize that of himself he is nothing, but he ought also to acknowledge his misery and his sin. Sin descends below nothingness because of its disorder and baseness. The man who has risen up against the principle of all order should recognize that he deserves to be put down, to undergo a punishment proportionate to his wrongdoing. He who has despised God's love and preferred the lowest goods to Him, who has lost the life of grace and has no right to the divine friendship, still owes his debt to sovereign Justice and should pay it. Urged by actual grace to repentance, man seeks to express the sorrow of "a contrite and humble heart," and takes from among the animals belonging to him the best, the purest, the gentlest, and, as if he wished to burden the animal with his crime, he then immolates it to the Lord, asking His pardon with this sacrifice of expiation or reparation.

The four great motives of sacrifice are then adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and expiation. In the Old Testament these four ends were often represented by different sacrifices. The unique sacrifice of the new alliance unites them all and

¹⁹ IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 1.

realizes in a marvelous way a twofold mediation between God and man, offering adoration, gratitude, and reparation to God and bringing to man pardon and the new graces needed for his perseverance and growth in goodness.

Considered from this point of view both our Lord's sacrifice and His priesthood are the most perfect conceivable. The perfection of the priesthood results from the triple union of the priest with God, with the victim which he offers, and with the people for whom he offers it. The fathers and theologians of the Church frequently concern themselves with these considerations.²⁰

The holier a priest is, and the more united to God, the more perfect is his sacrifice, for a priest should make up by his sanctity for the people's imperfection in adoring, thanking, and petitioning God, and offering reparation to Him. The purer and more precious the victim and the more fully it is consumed in God's honor, the more perfect is the sacrifice. In the Old Law the holocaust was recognized as the most perfect of all sacrifices because the entire victim was consumed in God's honor to signify man's duty to offer his whole self to God.

A sacrifice gains in perfection according to the closeness of the union between priest and victim, the victim's external oblation and immolation being only a sign of the internal oblation and immolation in the priest's heart as he performs the greatest act of the virtue of religion.

Lastly, the more united priest and people are, the more perfect is the sacrifice. The priest should unify all the acts of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and reparation offered by

²⁰ Cf. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Bk. IV, chap. 14, and St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 48, a. 3.

the faithful into one great elevation to God, lifting up, as it were, the soul of the whole people. As a consequence, the greater the number of people united to the priest, the greater is the homage paid to God and the more far-reaching are the effects of the sacrifice.²¹

We have only to apply these principles to our Lord's priesthood to conclude immediately that none greater than His could be conceived. Christ Jesus, our priest, has no taint whatever of original or personal sin or any imperfection; He is holiness itself. Priest inasmuch as He is man and not inasmuch as He is God, He is a mediator and, under this title, less than God. Nevertheless, because Christ's humanity belongs to the Word made flesh, the priestly acts of Jesus proceed from His human intellect and will and yet have an infinitely

²¹ Blessed Albert the Great in his treatise, *De Eucharistia*, dist. V, cap. 3, *De hujus sacrificii acceptabilitate* (ed. Borgnet, 1899; XXXVIII, 347) explains at length St. Augustine's words in *De Trinitate*, Bk. IV, chap. 14: "What could be offered more precious than the flesh of our sacrifice, which is the very body of our Priest? In sacrifice we can consider what is offered, to whom it is offered, who offers it and why. Now the one true Mediator, reconciling us with God through His sacrifice of peace, is one with God to whom the sacrifice is offered, and makes Himself one with those for whom it is offered."

Albert the Great shows why it is impossible that this sacrifice would not be received: "It is offered to the Father by the Son, our priest. Christ in His human nature, His flesh and blood, is the offering. He is offered for us all. Divine Wisdom has united the victim offered and the priest offering in one and the same person. It has united the priest to the person to whom the oblation is made, for Father and Son are one through their divine nature. It has united the victim offered with those for whom it is offered, for Christ has a human nature like ours. And as God the Father cannot but be acceptable to Himself, so our priest, being one with the Father, must be acceptable to Him too. And as our priest cannot but be acceptable to the Father, so must His offering be acceptable. Priest and victim being accepted, those for whom the oblation is made cannot but be agreeable to Him too, for they are of the same nature as the victim and the priest, and the blood of Christ has purified them from all that would prevent them from being received by God, their incorporation through the sacrament uniting them to the priest and the victim. . . . We thus have a more than sufficient oblation, spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews 7: 25: 'Whereby He is able also to save forever them that come to God by Him; always living to make intercession for us.' We have but to offer our purified selves together with Christ, and the Father will accept us."

meritorious and satisfactory value because they arise from the fountainhead of the divine personality of the Word. And even until now the Word made flesh keeps interceding for us through His human soul.

Furthermore, as head of the Church, our Lord received the fullness of created grace to pour out its overflow upon us, and a power of excellence to institute the sacraments. The sacraments He fashioned potent to produce and increase the divine life in us and the priesthood He made participant in His own.²² His sacrifice takes away all the sins of the world: *Ecce Agnus Dei, qui tollit peccata mundi*. If sin continues, it continues not because His sacrifice lacks virtue like those of the Old Law but because men often have no will to receive its fruits.

The victim of Calvary is worthy of Calvary's priest. Jesus could not have offered any other victim than Himself to His Father. As a figure of Christ, the youth Isaac allowed himself to be used for his father's sacrifice; but at the crucifixion Jesus made His own offering of Himself. "Therefore doth the Father love Me: because I lay down My life, that I may take it up again. No man taketh it from Me: but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father."²³

This purest victim has infinite worth for it is the body of the Word of God, His blood, His torn and broken heart, His very soul, abandoned and full of sorrow. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" His complete immolation makes reparation for the pride of life, the concupiscence

²² Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 64, a. 4; Suppl., q. 35, a. 2.

²³ John 10: 17 f.

of the flesh and of the eyes. The final humiliations, the overwhelming suffering, and perfect self-divestment are offered for love of us. No mind can think of a victim purer or more precious or more completely consumed in God's honor than our dying Jesus, the most perfect holocaust ever lifted up to God in the greatest anguish of body and soul.

The union between priest and victim could not be more intimate; nor the bond between the interior and exterior sacrifice straiter, because the priest Himself is the victim, not only as to His body, but also as to His heart and soul. The sorrow that pierces Him through arises from His charity in the face of the tremendous evil that His Father commissioned Him to blot out. It follows, then, that the priest, the Savior's minister, can become a living image of His adored Master only by becoming in some measure a victim like Him. We see this in the lives of the saints who win honor for the priesthood. If they have not endured martyrdom of body, they have undergone martyrdom of heart; otherwise their apostolate would not bear the likeness of the crucified Savior.

The union of priest and victim becomes more and more evident in the Cenacle, on Calvary, and after the resurrection. The Eucharist celebrated in the Cenacle is the beginning of the Passion as well as its consequence. Love prepares for suffering, and suffering perfects love. Suffering is the measure of love; and love, of suffering. Whoever loves God and is loved by Him becomes devoted to a life of suffering, as Jesus, our Savior and model, was. He speaks to His best friends of His love and of His passion, leading them to realize that He desires them to have a share in both that they may be intimately at one with Him.

The union between priest and people could not be closer

than between Jesus and us. Jesus is the head of the mystical body; we are the members. From Him the fruit of His sacrifice, the life of grace nourished by Holy Communion, continually flows down to us. At the same time, through Him our acts of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and reparation ascend to the Father in union with His and do more to please God than all the sins of men can achieve to displease Him.

Above all at Holy Mass are St. Paul's words verified: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members of member."²⁴ "But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in Him who is the head, even Christ."²⁵ "Christ is the head of the Church. He is the savior of His body."²⁶ It is chiefly through the Mass, the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the cross, that these words of St. Paul continue to be realized until the end of time: "Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it; that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life: that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish."²⁷

In the Sacrifice of the Mass the victim is the same as in the sacrifice of the cross, being present there substantially. The same High Priest offers the sacrifice, never ceasing to make intercession for us,²⁸ continuing to offer Himself for us through the ministry of His priests by applying to us the fruits of His merits and giving Himself to us as our food. The Council of Trent expressed it thus: "For the victim is

²⁴ I Cor. 12: 27.

²⁵ Eph. 4: 15.

²⁶ Eph. 5: 23.

²⁷ Eph. 5: 26.

²⁸ Heb. 7: 25.

one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits of that bloody sacrifice, it is well understood, are received most abundantly through this unbloody one, so far is the latter from derogating in any way from the former."²⁹

On the cross the victim and the immolation were evident; the priest and His intention of offering a sacrifice for all mankind remained mysterious and hidden for many. To some Christ on the cross has nothing of victory about Him, but seems Himself vanquished by sin and Satan and His work destroyed. Since the resurrection, the priest as Christ's minister, the intention of offering sacrifice, and the offering itself are all evident; but the mystical and unbloody immolation wrought through the separate consecration and transubstantiation of the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ is mysterious. On the altar Christ is represented in the state of death, and so continues to offer Himself through the ministry of His priests until the end of time. The Cross and the Mass serve to illuminate one another in a wonderful way. What lies concealed in the Cross becomes manifest in the Mass; and what remains mysterious in the Mass stands out clearly in the Cross. Both hold in common the principal priest, His interior act of oblation, and the victim offered; that is, each contains the substance of the sacrifice.

Since Jesus came into the world His interior act of oblation has never been absent from His heart. This act continues in heaven, the ever-living Christ never ceasing to make intercession for us. His act is no longer meritorious, because He has reached the end of His journey; but it applies to us the

²⁹ Sess. XXII, chap. 2.

merits of the crucifixion and remains ever an act of adoration of infinite worth, an oblation alone worthy of the victim offered. "*Idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio.*"

Together with Himself Christ offers His Church militant, His suffering members, who do what they can to make up for what is wanting in the sufferings of Christ,³⁰ not that the passion of Jesus of itself lacks anything, but it needs to find its reflection and application in His members throughout the centuries; and Jesus Himself accomplished what suffering remains to be done in His mystical body, really configuring us to His own image.³¹

After the last Mass, when the world has passed away, no sacrifice of expiation or of impetration will endure. Sacrifice properly so called will be over; the time of symbols and figures and sacraments will have passed; we shall see God face to face. Christ will no longer ask of His Father the remission of our sins, the grace for us to avoid sin. Yet His priesthood will be no less eternal: *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum.*³² If sacrifice will no longer exist, there will be the consummation of sacrifice. Jesus in a perfect and eternal act of adoration and thanksgiving, will continue His interior offering of Himself and His wholly glorified mystical body.

St. Augustine speaks of this eternal adoration and thanksgiving in his work *De praedestinatione sanctorum*; and the Church associates us even in this world with the worship of the elect when she has us sing at Mass, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus. . .*³³ Christ is "a high priest of the good things to

³⁰ Col. 1: 24.

³¹ Rom. 8: 17; I Cor. 12: 26; Phil. 3: 10; II Cor. 4: 10.

³² Ps. 111: 4; Heb. 6: 6; 7: 17, 21.

³³ Cf. IIIa, q. 22, a. 5.

come."³⁴ He has entered once and for all into the holy of holies, and the blessed are enriched with glory merited by Him as the consummation of His sacrifice. "For the glory of God hath enlightened it (the city of God), and the Lamb is the lamp thereof."³⁵

ARTICLE III

THE FORMAL CAUSE OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

Theologians ask what formally constitutes our Lord's priesthood, what corresponds in Jesus to the priestly character in His ministers. Is it the substantial grace of personal union with the Word, by which Jesus is the Holy One, the Sanctifier, and Mediator? Or is it rather the created habitual grace received into His sacred soul, constituting Him head of the mystical body and exercising His influence immediately on the members of that body?

The Carmelites of Salamanca maintain³⁶ that what formally constitutes Christ's priesthood is habitual created grace (*gratia capitis*) so far as it presupposes and connotes the grace of union. According to this view, the same grace that designates Christ as head of the Church also makes Him our priest.

Other theologians, many Thomists among them,³⁷ come to the apparently correct conclusion that what formally constitutes the priesthood of Jesus Christ is the grace of union, because of which He is the Holy One, the Sanctifier, and

³⁴ Heb. 9: 11.

³⁵ Apoc. 21: 23.

³⁶ *Cursus theologicus, de incarnatione*, disp. XXXI, dub. 1, sec. 4, no. 16.

³⁷ Cf. Gonet, O.P., *Clypeus thom. theol., de incarnatione*, disp. XXII, a. 3 (Paris, 1876); Hugon, O.P., *De Verbo incarnato*, 2nd ed., pp. 628 ff. (Paris: Tequi, 1913).

Mediator. To be priest and universal mediator, the offerer of a sacrifice of infinite value, means more than to be head of mankind. In the state of innocence Adam was mankind's head (*caput naturae elevatae*), but he had no power as priest and mediator to offer a sacrifice of infinite worth. The formal cause of Christ's priesthood would therefore seem to be the grace of substantial union with the Word, which makes Him God's anointed.³⁸ The grace of union implies in fact a unique priestly vocation and is the principle of created habitual grace, by which Christ, the head of the Church, immediately influences His members and communicates supernatural life to them. All these gifts are essential to His priesthood, but the grace of union is its formal constituent.

Such seems to be St. Thomas' thought in those passages treating of Christ as the universal mediator.³⁹ To his mind, Jesus as man acts as mediator between God and men by the grace of the hypostatic union, through which He touches the two extremes to be reunited or reconciled, God and mankind. His substantial grace of union with the Word sanctifies Jesus, giving Him not an accidental sanctity like ours, which proceeds from created habitual grace, a divinely engrafted accident in the soul, but a substantial sanctity, acting as the principle of His infinitely meritorious and satisfactory human acts.⁴⁰ Now among these acts, the offering of the sacrifice of the cross, substantially perpetuated in the Mass, is His greatest priestly act. While Christ's ministers are constituted

³⁸ Ps. 44: 8.

³⁹ IIIa, q. 26, a. 1, 2.

⁴⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, *Catena aurea*, in Joan. 10: 36, ad illa verba: "*Quem Pater sanctificavit et misit in mundum*," dicit ex Hilario: "*Præcedit coeteros per id quod sanctificatus in Filium est, beato Paulo dicente: prædestinatus est Filius Dei in virtute secundum Spiritum sanctum.*"

priests by an indelible accident or mark imprinted on their souls, the priestly character, Jesus Himself is our priest by reason of the substantial grace of union, which makes Him the saint of saints.

He is a priest, therefore, because of the Incarnation itself, and His priesthood, like His sanctity, is substantial. God decreed the Incarnation and called Jesus to the priesthood and to His universal mediatorship by one and the same act. For Jesus to communicate His holiness to us, He had to be the head of humanity as well, through habitual grace, the proximate principle of meritorious and satisfactory acts.⁴¹

Bossuet, in speaking of the nature of Christ's priesthood, has the same thing to say.

O Christ! O Messias! You who were expected and given under the sacred name signifying the Lord's anointed! teach me, in the excellence of Your unction, the origin and basis of Christianity. . . . O Christ! The Psalmist saw You under this name when he sang: "Thy throne, O God is forever and ever . . . therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness."⁴² When the angel Gabriel announced the exact time of Your coming, he made it known by saying that the saint of saints would be anointed and that the Anointed, the Christ, would be slain.⁴³ And You Yourself, of what did You preach in the synagogue when You told Your mission? What did You choose but that beautiful text from Isaias, "The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me"?⁴⁴ "For God doth not give the Spirit by measure," says St. John,⁴⁵ but without measure and with perfect fullness. . . . Jesus is therefore anointed by the Holy Ghost, having the

⁴¹ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 8.

⁴² Ps. 44: 7 f.

⁴³ Dan. 9: 21-26.

⁴⁴ Isa. 61: 1; Luke 4: 18.

⁴⁵ John 3: 34.

Holy Ghost within Him because of His divinity and thus made Christ and by this divine union our anointed king, high priest, and prophet.

Come, Jesus, eternal Son of God, without mother in heaven and without Father on earth. In You we see and acknowledge a royal descent; but Your priesthood can come to You and be held by You only from Him who has said to You: "Thou art My son, this day have I begotten Thee."⁴⁶ To possess a divine priesthood one must be born of God; You have Your vocation by eternal birth.⁴⁷ The privilege of Your priesthood has been established by an unshakable oath, without repentance and without alteration: "The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent, Thou art a priest forever."⁴⁸ You alone are the eternal priest; yet You have left us priests as Your delegates, without power to offer any other victim than that which You onetime offered upon the cross and which You now offer eternally at the right hand of the Father.⁴⁹

Pope Pius XI in an allocution (December 28, 1925) also said that the *Omoousios* became man and poured out and still pours out His inexhaustible and infinite person in Jesus Christ, who is consecrated priest by this union, called by theologians substantial: "*E unicamente perche l'Omoousios di Nicea si è incarnato . . . che si effuse e si effonde, inesauribile ed infinita, in Gesu Christo, quella che i teologi chiamano unzione sostanziale, che los consecrava sacerdote.*"⁵⁰

To end with a practical conclusion, it would be impossible to recommend too strongly that interior souls have a great devotion to the consecration, the very essence of the Sacrifice

⁴⁶ Ps. 2: 7.

⁴⁷ Heb. 7: 16.

⁴⁸ Heb. 7: 13-24.

⁴⁹ *Elévations sur les mystères*, 13th week, nos. 1, 6. *Œuvres complètes de Bossuet* (Paris: Gaume, 1846).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1926, p. 182.

of the Mass, the most solemn moment of each day. It is, Bossuet says, "the action of Jesus Christ, setting His body on one side and His blood on the other by virtue of His words, showing Himself to God under the imagery of death and burial, honoring Him as Lord of life and death, plainly acknowledging His sovereign majesty by the most perfect obedience . . . even to the death of the cross. The oblation made on the altar is but a mystical death and immolation. The Lamb is nevertheless there, and the blood too in its entirety, and it is shed, although in a hidden and mysterious manner, that to each may be applied what was once offered for all."⁵¹

When Christ instituted the Eucharist He lifted His eyes to heaven and His face shone. He burned with desire to annihilate Himself in a way under the species of bread and wine, in order to remain really and substantially among us until the end of time, giving Himself to us as our food. At the moment of consecration, the priest, as the minister of the universal Mediator, lifts his eyes to heaven and should also ardently desire to unite himself to the oblation of Christ ever living to make intercession for us.⁵² Christ never ceases to offer to the Father, together with the offering of Himself, all the living members of His mystical body, particularly those who follow His example and suffer some little of what He has suffered.⁵³

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, VIII, 432, 434, the beginning of the "Explication de la Messe."

⁵² Heb. 7: 25.

⁵³ According to St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Thomas and his disciples, St. Bonaventure, and the great majority of theologians, Christ in glory, in heaven, is not satisfied with recalling to the Father the prayers that He said for us on earth but continues to pray for us in the proper sense of the word. Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 83, a. 11; *Comm. in Ep. ad Hebr.* 7: 25; *Salmanticenses*, "De incarnatione," disp. XXX, dub. II; Gonet, *Clypeus thom. theol.*, "De incarnatione," disp. XXII, a. 2.

At the moment of consecration, the faithful assisting at Holy Mass should also unite themselves to the oblation of the eternal Priest, who continues to offer Himself through the ministry of His priests, as the Council of Trent tells us. Interior souls should offer Christ's sacred body and precious blood to His Father in union with our Lord. Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost they too offer themselves and should ask to love the future crosses reserved for them from all eternity by Providence to purify them and make them cooperate in some measure in the great mystery of the Redemption. People and communities who live deeply united to the act of consecration enjoy Christ's love to an eminent degree and, as it is said in the beautiful prayer to the Eucharistic Heart, they enter more and more deeply into the secrets of divine union and find great peace therein, whatever trials may come to them. They dispose themselves to renew this act with special fervor at the hour of death, to make it a perfect sacrifice of adoration, of supplication, of reparation, and of thanksgiving, capable of immediately opening the gates of heaven for them.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Recently some articles have appeared in *La vie spirituelle* entitled "Élévations sur la prière au Cœur Eucharistique de Jésus" and written some time ago by someone whose complete renouncement had led to intimate union with the priestly heart of the Master. We strongly recommend these "Élévations" to interior souls to be read during their visits to the Blessed Sacrament or as a preparation for mental prayer.

CHAPTER XV

THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST

"All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth."

Matt. 28: 18

The Church's doctrine on our Lord's priesthood receives a happy complement from what the liturgy for the feast of Christ the King teaches us about His universal kingship over minds and hearts.

The present era, with the Bolshevist movement ravaging Russia with satanic fury and now attempting to spread through the Orient and threatening all Europe, drives home to us the fact that, when the spirit of Christ no longer reigns, the deadly spirit of evil takes its place. The League of Nations refused to recognize God's rights over men and therefore, by failing to recognize the principle of order, showed itself radically powerless to re-establish order.

As Cardinal Mercier wrote in his pastoral letter of 1918: "The principal crime which the world is expiating at the present time is the official apostasy of nations." His Eminence added: "That religious indifference which places divine religion and the invented religions of men on the same footing, and surrounds them all with the same skepticism, I do not hesitate to call blasphemy. More than all the sins of individuals and of families, it calls down upon society the chastisement of God."

Secularism denies God's rights over human society and commits the crime of "lèse-divinité," of high treason against the Author of society, the greatest evil of the modern world. To make reparation for this crime, we must extol Jesus Christ as the universal king of individuals, families, and societies. If Christ's universal kingship is proclaimed and His social reign recognized, one of the chief errors of the modern world will be struck at its very root.

Interior souls especially should live more by this great thought and their worship of Christ's kingship should include both adoration and reparation. It has seemed worthwhile, therefore, to consider our Lord's royal character in relation to the interior life, which should be the soul of all exterior worship, whether individual or social.

With this thought in mind, let us see: (1) what Sacred Scripture tells us of Christ's universal kingship; (2) its nature, basis, and excellence; (3) the way Jesus exercises His universal royal power.

ARTICLE I

CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL KINGSHIP IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Messianic texts that foretell the future Christ, make increasingly plain His attributes as universal king. Genesis announces that the peoples of the earth shall be blessed in Him and that He shall be the expected of the nations. Numbers says that out of Jacob shall arise the true ruler.¹

Psalms 2 represents the Messiah as a person distinct from the Father, whom the Father calls His real son, who has all

¹ Gen. 12: 2 f.; 23: 17; 26: 4; 49: 8; Num. 24: 17.

peoples as His heritage: "The Lord hath said to Me: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession. . . . And now, O ye kings, understand: receive instruction, you that judge the earth. Serve ye the Lord with fear: and rejoice unto Him with trembling."

Psalm 109 describes Christ's kingship and His priesthood: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit thou at My right hand; Until I make thy enemies thy footstool. The Lord will send forth the scepter of thy power out of Sion: rule thou in the midst of thy enemies. . . . He shall judge among nations."

Psalm 71, *Deus, iudicium regi da*, announces the justice, peace, and prosperity of the reign of the Messiah: "And He shall rule from sea to sea. . . . And all kings of the earth shall adore Him; all nations shall serve Him. For He shall deliver the poor from the mighty: and the needy that had no helper. . . . Let His name be blessed for evermore: His name continueth before the sun. And in Him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed: all nations shall magnify Him."

Isaias likewise proclaims: "The government is upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace . . . to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and forever."²

Daniel also speaks of this kingdom when he says that a little stone will first overthrow and break into pieces the colossus with clay feet and then become a great mountain filling the whole earth.³

² Isa. 9: 6 f.

³ Dan. 2: 34 ff.

Zacharias extols the virtues of his humble and poor but just and saving King: "Behold thy King will come to thee, the just and savior: He is poor."⁴

If the Old Testament so clearly and frequently declares the Savior's universal kingship, we would expect the New Testament to be even more explicit; and so it is. The archangel Gabriel, announcing to Mary the birth of her Son, said of Him: "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever."⁵ "*Cujus regni non erit finis*," as we say in the *Credo*. In the adoration of the Magi, kings reveal Him as a universal king, for these men who offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Him as a king sent by God were not Jews but Gentiles.

In His public life Jesus exercised His supreme power in different ways. He brought to perfection the divine law given to men through Moses.⁶ He showed Himself as Lord of the divinely instituted Sabbath.⁷ With a single word He forgave sins and brought souls as well as bodies back to life.⁸ By His miracles He manifested His power over the whole of material and spiritual creation.⁹ The very angels gladly subjected themselves to Him and served Him.¹⁰

At the end of His public life Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph to hear the crowd cry out: "Hosanna to the son of David."¹¹ . . . "Blessed be the king who cometh in the

⁴ Zach. 9: 9.

⁵ Luke 1: 32.

⁶ Matt. 5: 17.

⁷ Matt. 9: 15.

⁸ Luke 5: 17-26.

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 44.

¹⁰ Luke 2: 13; Matt. 4: 11; 24: 53.

¹¹ Matt. 21: 9.

name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high!"¹² As St. Matthew records, it had been declared in the Old Testament: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold thy king cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of her that is used to the yoke."¹³ The garb of humility is worthy of Him who came into the world to trample human greatness underfoot; and, as Bossuet says,¹⁴ we cannot help but be struck by the fact that, although Jesus fled to the mountains when the people wished to make Him a temporal king after the multiplication of the loaves of bread, He accepted the Palm Sunday acclamations of the crowd in public testimony of His spiritual kingship. He entered Jerusalem to consummate the work of our redemption and to win His kingdom. The Pharisees, provoked by the people's acclamations, said to Him, "Master, rebuke Thy disciples." And He answered them, "I say to you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."¹⁵

Jesus makes His point even more forcefully by refusing all the outward honors of temporal kingship and then confessing during His passion that He is a king. Never was He greater or more dignified than during those hours of humiliation and ignominy. As Bossuet says, He who had never spoken to His disciples of His kingship revealed it to Pilate; He who made no reference to it when He was working miracles proclaimed it while suffering the torments of His passion.

He desires us to understand that He holds His spiritual sovereignty over our souls not only by right of birth but also

¹² Luke 19: 38.

¹³ Zach. 9: 9.

¹⁴ Sermon on the kingship of Jesus Christ. *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ Luke 19: 39 f.

by His death as our Redeemer. Pilate said to Him, "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" And Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world."¹⁶ That is, My kingdom has its origin elsewhere and My rule is exercised otherwise than in the kingdoms of this world. Pilate insists, "Art Thou a king then?" And Jesus answers: "Thou sayest, that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth, heareth My voice." That is to say, I am king not only of the Jews but of all those who hear My testimony of truth.

Jesus is a king, but a king of poverty and sorrow, winning His right to rule His spiritual realm by His passion. In mockery the Jews gave Him a crown of thorns for a diadem, and a fragile reed for a scepter, not understanding the symbolism of the crown of thorns which they bestowed nor seeing the infinite value of the drops of blood with which Christ jeweled it. Pilate had our Lord's title of kingship written above Him on the cross in the three most widely known languages of the ancient world, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, in order that all might know of it. The Jews protested, but Pilate, until that moment so weak, stubbornly held to what he had written.

Jesus is a king, but a crucified king, a redeemer king because of His suffering. "His cross is His throne, His blood is His royal purple, His torn flesh is His power."¹⁷ Who understood all this as Jesus hung dying? She who shared His sufferings and His kingship, Mary, the co-redemptrix.

God's kingdom is now established. Our King, by His crucifixion, has redeemed us from the slavery of sin and Satan; three days after His death His mysterious victory over sin is

¹⁶ John 18: 36.

¹⁷ Bossuet, *loc. cit.*

manifested in a striking way by His victory over death, the consequence and chastisement of sin. The risen Jesus then says to His apostles: "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, teach ye all nations. . . . Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."¹⁸

The resurrection restores Christ's glory to Him, and in the Apocalypse¹⁹ St. John contemplates His triumph in heaven, seeing Him on a throne of splendor, with His name written on His garment *Rex regum, Dominus dominorum*, King of kings and Lord of lords, the supreme Judge rendering to every man according to his works.²⁰

St. Paul tells the Philippians that Jesus holds His universal kingship by right of inheritance because of His equality with God, and by right of conquest because "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father."²¹ "For He must reign. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then the Son also Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."²²

Among the Fathers who spoke most distinctly of Christ's universal and kingly sovereignty, we should cite St. Justin,²³

¹⁸ Matt. 28: 18.

¹⁹ Matt. 19: 16.

²⁰ Cf. Apoc. 1: 18; 4: 9; 6: 10; 22: 13; 17: 14.

²¹ Phil. 2: 5 ff. Also Rom. 8: 31; Heb. 1: 1.

²² I Cor. 15: 25-27.

²³ *Dial. cum Tryphone*, P.G., VI, 600, 620.

St. Irenaeus,²⁴ St. Ephrem,²⁵ St. Cyril of Alexandria,²⁶ and St. Ambrose, who wrote: "Rightly was the title of king placed on the cross, because from it radiated the kingly majesty of Jesus."²⁷ The liturgy salutes Christ as the King of glory in the *Te Deum*, "*Tu rex gloriae, Christe*"; in the Advent antiphons it calls Him the King of nations, "*O Rex gentium*"; and for the feast of Corpus Christi it addresses Him as "*Christum Regem dominantem gentibus*," the Lord and ruler of earth's peoples. The Mass for the feast of Christ the King summarizes the whole doctrine in the brevity of a collect: "Almighty, everlasting God, who in Thy beloved Son, King of the whole world, hast willed to restore all things anew; grant in Thy mercy that all the families of nations, rent asunder by the wound of sin, may be subjected to His most gentle rule."

ARTICLE II

THE NATURE, BASIS, AND EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S KINGSHIP

When we think of kingship two kinds come to mind: first, temporal kingship, ordered to promote the temporal good of society; and secondly, spiritual kingship, with the direction of all men to the supernatural happiness of a future life as its end. Had Christ a temporal kingship over the whole world? So far as He is God and Creator, He is most surely the absolute Master of the universe in the temporal as well

²⁴ *Contr. Haeres.*, Bk. IV, chap. 12; P.G., VII, 1005.

²⁵ *Ephr.* ed Lamy, "Le testament de saint Ephrem le syrien," in *Compte rendu du quatrième Congrès internationale des Catholiques*, August 16-20, 1897. Sciences religieuses (Fribourg, 1898), pp. 173-209.

²⁶ *In Joan.*, Bk. XII; P.G., LXXXIV, 622.

²⁷ *Expos. in Luc*, X; P.L., XV, 1925.

as in the spiritual order.²⁸ But so far as He is man, had He royal temporal power? The majority of theologians answer that He had it by right but in fact willed not to exercise it.

St. Thomas and St. Antoninus as well teach that, although Christ was constituted king by God Himself, He did not will to have on earth the temporal administration of an earthly realm.²⁹ This doctrine, well defended by the Carmelites of Salamanca,³⁰ has become more and more common today and was sanctioned by the encyclical *Quas primas* of December 11, 1925. If some theologians³¹ have doubted or denied that Jesus as man possessed royal temporal power, this is owing to the fact that they have considered the question from too narrow a point of view.

Following the Carmelites of Salamanca, Father Hugon justly remarks:

It is not enough to say that Jesus is simply a spiritual king, for that means putting limits to a kingship which Scripture and tradition attribute to Him without reserve. Let us look at the question in a higher and more general way and say: The whole Christ, the Redeemer, our blessed Savior, who subsists in two natures, the divine and the human, is a king in the completest sense of the word, ruling in the temporal as well as in the spiritual order, without restriction. . . . He who said, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth,"³² is Christ in His two natures, the visible Christ, speaking to His apostles. Now nothing is excluded from His empire, absolute on earth as well as in heaven. . . . St. Paul states the same truth when he says: "All things are put under Him;

²⁸ Cf. Col. 1:16.

²⁹ IIIa, q. 59, a. 4, a. 1; q. 58, a. 2.

³⁰ *Salmanticenses*, "De incarnatione," disp. xxxii, dub. 2.

³¹ Blessed Bellarmine, *de Rom. Pont.*, chaps. 4, 5; Tolet, Sylvius, *in Illam*, q. 59; Billuart, *De iustitia*, diss. III, a. 6.

³² Matt. 28:18.

undoubtedly, he is excepted, who put all things under Him."³³ "All," in the temporal as in the spiritual order, all except the Father, to whom He is subject. What is meant is that Christ reigns not only in His divine nature, because of which He has no need for the Father to subject all creatures to Him, but also in His human nature, because of which He can receive the government of the universe.³⁴

As a consequence of the hypostatic union, Jesus has received sovereign dominion over all things, being constituted by God the judge of the living and of the dead,³⁵ of kings as well as of subjects, and, as St. Peter says, "Lord of all."³⁶ Therefore the liturgy calls Him the King of nations, "*O Rex gentium . . . veni et salva hominem quem de limo formasti.*"³⁷

In fact, however, Jesus willed not to exercise His temporal power in the world. He freely chose a poor and humble life, and payed the tribute like anyone else, although He had no obligation to do so.³⁸ Moreover, after the multiplication of the loaves when the people were dazzled by the miracle and carried away by dreams of material prosperity and wished to make Him king, Jesus saw that they looked for an entirely earthly magnificence and He left them, fleeing away into the mountains alone.³⁹

The apostles themselves, laboring under the same delusion, believed that He was going to found a temporal kingdom, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee came asking that they might have the first two places in the new realm. Our Lord

³³ I Cor. 15:27.

³⁴ *Revue Thomiste*, July, 1925, p. 304, "La fête spéciale de Jésus-Christ roi."

³⁵ John 5:22, 27.

³⁶ Acts 10:36.

³⁷ Advent antiphon.

³⁸ Matt. 27:26.

³⁹ John 6:15.

answered: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" Up until the time of the ascension the apostles still held a mistaken view on this subject, and at the very moment when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven they asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"⁴⁰ They had not yet really grasped Jesus' answer to the Pharisees: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say: Behold here, or behold there. For lo, the kingdom of God is within you."⁴¹

Jesus shows us by these words that His kingship belongs first of all to the spiritual order. He wields His royal power by ascendancy, by attraction, by love, by intellectual, moral, and supernatural authority over minds, wills, and hearts. By it He has founded a spiritual society, the Church, and holds the place of its head by a double title: first, as His birthright; for He is the Word made flesh, the Son of God, and thus inherits from His Father the right to command all men; secondly, as His by right of conquest; for we have been unfaithful, becoming traitors to our king, and He has won us back by wresting our souls from the slavery of sin and Satan, buying us back with a great price.⁴² And we, by our baptismal vows freely renewed, have recognized His sovereign authority over us.

Christ's spiritual and temporal authority has the excellence of supremacy, leading all souls of good will to eternal happiness. It is an authority with power not only over bodies but over souls, not only over people, but over all kings and heads of states as well, the authority of the Son of God, Himself

⁴⁰ Acts 1: 6.

⁴¹ Luke 17: 21.

⁴² I Cor. 6: 20.

subject to the Father alone. Christ's authority belongs to the greatest intellect, the most loving heart, the most upright, kindest, and strongest will, and implies also the power of legislator and supreme judge.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared Himself the equal of the divine Legislator of Sinai by claiming that He had come to complete the Old Law. He repeated His assertion more than once: "You have heard that it was said to them of old; . . . but I say to you . . ." ⁴³ Perfecting the Old Law of fear, He made the New Law a law of grace and love. "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another." "Love your enemies, . . . pray for them that persecute and calumniate you." ⁴⁴

He is also the supreme judge, as His words to the apostles show: "And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: And whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven." ⁴⁵ He declared that He would one day come to judge the living and the dead.⁴⁶

His supreme authority is consequently universal, extending to all places, to all times, to all creatures; for Jesus has command even of the angels, the ministers of His kingdom. By right all things are now subject to Him; in fact at His second coming all will be subject to Him on earth as in heaven. In regard to Him no one can remain neutral. "He that is not with Me, is against Me." ⁴⁷ We cannot be neutral

⁴³ Matt. 6: 27-44.

⁴⁴ John 13: 34.

⁴⁵ Matt. 16: 19; 18: 18.

⁴⁶ John 5: 22, 27.

⁴⁷ Matt. 12: 30.

in regard to the final end of life; if we have no desire for it, we turn away from it.

The universal kingship of Jesus orders all things toward their ultimate end; He is "the way, the truth, and the life." He leads souls to eternal life, there to enjoy God face to face and to love Him above all things with the absolute certainty of never losing Him by sin. Herein the infinite goodness of our King shows itself strong with nothing of weakness about it. The kings of earth seek to obtain temporal goods for their people by imperfect and often impotent means. Christ leads us effectually to our last supernatural end, to everlasting happiness; He bestows upon us His light, His strength, His life, and His love to bring us there, giving Himself as our food to restore our strength and to communicate His life to us. Only those who obstinately refuse to let Him lead them, to let Him save them, who scorn His divine love and will not be drawn to Him as He wills to draw them, fail to reach their goal.

Yet even the enemies of Jesus glorify Him indirectly. The obstacles they raise up against Him He transforms into means; persecutors serve to bring glory to martyrs, and that greatest of all obstacles, the cross, becomes the marvelous instrument of our salvation. A day will come when all Christ's unrelenting enemies will be finally and fully overcome. Then if He does not reign over them by mercy, He will reign over them by justice, as the Messianic psalm expresses it: "Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron, and shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel."⁴⁸ Even now hell trembles whenever we call upon His name.

But to men of good will, whose good will itself is evoked

⁴⁸ Ps. 2: 9.

by His grace, He will be sweetness and peace, *Princeps pacis*. As the Apocalypse says: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning nor crying nor sorrow."⁴⁹ He will have vanquished death after having triumphed over sin, the cause of sorrow and death in the actual plan of Providence. The reign of our King is our happiness and our salvation. He rules us in perfect peace, in the tranquillity of order radiating from Him upon us all.

ARTICLE III

THE EXERCISE OF CHRIST'S ROYAL POWER

Christ wields His royal power with wisdom unparalleled and goodness compounded of strength and sweetness, neglecting no smallest detail in its universality, whether in matters of Church government or of the intimate direction of souls.

Jesus exercises His royal power over civil society with prudence. He has the right to require not only that society should not be ruled by the atheistic principles of secularism, destructive of family and country alike, but also that it should be governed according to the principles of Christian law. He has the right to demand not only that national leaders should refrain from denying divine authority, the basis of their own, but also that they should recognize it publicly and submit to it themselves. Christ Jesus, the incarnation of truth, goodness, and justice, has a right to be taught in schools, to be carried to the sick in hospitals, to be represented in courts of justice when oaths are taken. He has a right to public worship in our cities, and the heads of nations will be judged if they

⁴⁹ Apoc. 21: 4.

have violated the imprescriptible law of Christ the King or if they have tried to stay neutral toward Him.⁵⁰

Our Lord comes to the aid of all who beg His help, inspiring their leaders to conform themselves and their institutions to the spirit of the gospel; to respect, for example, the divine law concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, to govern for the security of all, to procure a temporal peace subordinate to peace of soul and eternal life.

In the Church, Christ exercises His spiritual kingship by governing it through His vicar and the ecclesiastical hierarchy: that is, the bishops, pastors, and superiors of religious orders. Heresy and schism have often sought to divide Christ's realm, but the Church will remain one and indefectible until the end of time despite the efforts of hell against it. Christ is in His Church as once He was in Peter's boat; now as then a word from Him suffices to calm the tempest.

Our Lord is not only the absolute Master but the living head of His kingdom, directing all, bestowing life through the sacraments, giving regeneration to souls through baptism, later confirming them, sanctifying marriages, restoring grace by absolution, increasing it through Communion, sustaining those in their last agony, and leading all to eternal life. He inspires His ministers, enlightens His doctors, strengthens

⁵⁰ Cf. the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei* and *Libertas*. Read the Book of Wisdom, chap. 6, for the grave duties of kings and heads of states: "Hear, therefore, ye kings, and understand: learn, ye that are judges of the ends of the earth . . . you that rule the people. . . . For power is given you by the Lord, and strength by the Most High, who will examine your works, and search out your thoughts: Because being ministers of His kingdom, you have not judged right. . . . Horribly and speedily will He appear to you; for a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule. For to him that is little, mercy is granted; but the mighty shall be mightily tormented. For God will not except any man's person, neither will He stand in awe of any man's greatness: for He made the little and the great, and He hath equally care of all. But a greater punishment is ready for the more mighty."

His missionaries, protects His virgins, upholds Christian families, and fructifies vocations. Whatever human imperfections we find in His Church, He allows in view of a greater good until the time comes when evil will be definitively vanquished.

In the interior direction of souls Jesus exerts His kingly power in a profound and hidden way. Only He and His Father know what marvels take place within souls, although the lives of the saints from time to time reveal to us something of what will be fully known only on the last day. Jesus enlightens our souls interiorly with illuminations of faith, with gifts of wisdom, of understanding, of knowledge, and of counsel. He attracts and consoles us, inspiring us with filial piety for His Father, for Himself, and for His Blessed Mother. He prompts us to make good resolutions and strengthens us to keep them.

Jesus as God has sent us the Holy Ghost; as man He has received the fullness of the Spirit's gifts and He desires to share them with us. If we abandon ourselves completely to Him, He will fill us with His graces, and we shall receive more and more life from Him, growing in experimental knowledge of the *Te Deum*, "*Tu Rex gloriae, Christe*, and those words of the *Credo* which lifted St. Teresa into an ecstasy of joy, "*Cujus regni non erit finis.*"⁵¹

It is fitting, therefore, that we pay Christ's royal sovereignty special worship, particularly now when atheistic secularism is making greater and greater efforts to destroy it. The official apostasy of nations constitutes a crime calling for reparation

⁵¹ See Monsignor Sinibaldi's beautiful book on the subject *Il Regno del SS. Cuore* (Milan, 1924), in which the author, using St. Thomas' principles, considers the great theses in the treatises on the Incarnation and the Church from the point of view of Christ's kingship, which is especially a kingship of supernatural love, since Jesus reigns especially through charity.

by exterior as well as interior worship and by public as well as private acknowledgment of Christ's sovereignty. Such reparation can find no better expression than in the solemn, sincere, deep, and effective recognition of Christ's kingship over minds, wills, and hearts, over nations and over heads of nations. "For He must reign. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto Him then the Son also Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."⁵²

The purifications of the senses and of the soul discussed earlier in this work assure the complete reign of Jesus in our souls, for they lead us to that pure love of the Savior which finds all things in Him and seeks nought else besides. Realizing this, St. John of the Cross tells us: "To possess all, desire nothing. When thou thinkest upon anything, thou ceasest to cast thyself upon the All. . . . Thou must possess without desiring; for, if thou wilt have anything, thou hast not thy treasure purely in God."⁵³ And the liturgy speaks to us of God as the greatness of the humble, lifting up the lowly to His own exalted heights.

⁵² I Cor. 15: 25, 27.

⁵³ *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. I, chap. 13.

CHAPTER XVI

EXEMPLAR FOR OUR FREE WILL: CHRIST'S IMPECCABLE LIBERTY

"Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin . . . if therefore the son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

John 8: 34, 36

A life of union with God implies the use of our liberty in such a way that it becomes more and more confirmed in its choice of God, modeling itself on our Lord's impeccable liberty, a subject now to be considered in relation to the interior life.

The Church has defined that Jesus has two wills, as He has two intellects, a divine and uncreated will proper to His divine nature, and a human will proper to His human nature. Indeed if Jesus had not, below His divine will, a human will, He would not be really man and He could neither obey nor merit, for obedience and merit presuppose submission of will to another and higher will. The human will of Jesus contains a great mystery and a great lesson.

The great mystery consists in this, that, although our Lord's will was impeccable even while on earth, it was perfectly free in meriting, not merely with the kind of freedom admitted by the Jansenists, which is nothing else but spontaneity (*lib-*

ertas a coactione), but with the true liberty required for meriting.¹ Jesus could not have disobeyed His Father; yet He obeyed Him freely. How can obedience be free and meritorious when disobedience is not possible? So great is this mystery that some theologians, not seeing how they could avoid contradiction in admitting both truths, have maintained that the Father gave no command to Jesus and laid no obligation upon Him to die for us but merely proposed the sacrifice to Him, and He freely accepted it.

This solution is foreign to the doctrine of the great masters and has no foundation in Holy Scripture. On the contrary, more than once in the Gospels Jesus speaks of having received a command from His Father to die for us: "No man taketh it [life] away from Me: but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father."² After the Last Supper, just before the Passion, our Lord again says: "I will not now speak many things to you. For the prince of this world cometh, and in Me he hath not anything. But that the world may know, that I love the Father: and as the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I. Arise, let us go hence."³

St. Paul refers to an order and not simply to a counsel when he says to the Philippians that Jesus Christ "humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."⁴ Besides, other divine precepts constituted an obligation for our Lord's human liberty: "If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; as I also have

¹ Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 1904.

² John 10: 18.

³ John 14: 31.

⁴ Phil. 2: 8.

kept My Father's commandments, and do abide in His love."⁵

How then could Christ be at once impeccable and perfectly free in His obedience? This mystery will always remain obscure to us in this life, but it seems impossible only to those who entertain the world's idea of liberty rather than the saints'. The saints consider liberty freedom for good; as such Christ possessed it in a sovereign degree; whereas the world looks upon liberty as freedom for evil just as much as freedom for good. Here a light is given to us for contemplation and for action, a great lesson on the relationship between free will and deliverance from sin.

The better to understand it, let us see: (1) the world's notion of liberty; (2) Christ's liberty on earth; (3) the liberty of the saints.

ARTICLE I

THE WORLD'S NOTION OF LIBERTY

The world holds liberty to be the ability to choose between good and evil, between duty and the whims of egoism, the power to withdraw from law and authority. The world then readily puts opposition between freedom and authority and seems to feel itself at liberty only when it has escaped from some obligation, from what it terms servile obedience, believing itself really free when it can say with Satan, "I will not serve, I will not obey." Or, if it achieves some good, it desires to do so not because God has commanded it but because it results in some satisfaction or entails the development of the natural faculties.

What the world calls liberty has no patience with restraint

⁵ John 15: 10.

or rule, flees the wise directions of authority, and rushes toward real servitude, toward a fall, and sometimes into vile-ness. We escape God's holy commandments only to be made slaves of our own passions, which throw off the rule of reason and soon become its masters: "Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin." The sinner is no longer led by right reason, but allows himself to be driven by inordinate inclinations and, wherever he goes, he carries his slavery with him.

In one of His most beautiful parables, Jesus has shown us the world's view of liberty and to what a downfall it leads.⁶ The prodigal son, impatient to use his freedom to throw off his father's authority, asks for his share of the inheritance, and his father gives it to him. "And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country: and there wasted his substance, living riotously." Liberty was not enough for him; he had to have license, and license leads to misery. "And after he had spent all, there came a mighty famine in that country: and he began to be in want. And he went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country. And he sent him into his farm to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him."

The story of the prodigal is re-enacted daily in the realm of the spiritual. How many souls who had faith, hope, and charity and lived in their heavenly Father's house, have asked Him for their share of the inheritance that they might use their liberty as they liked! They have given up being directed by faith in order to direct themselves, to be guided, so they say, by reason; but then they fall below reason into egoism, pride, and sensuality. Their passions enslave them, take turns

⁶ Luke 15: 12.

at ruling them and make war upon one another. They become slaves of this poor world, bound by conventions that are often ridiculous. Unwilling to submit to God's holy laws, they find themselves obliged to bow down before the silly caprices of those who set the fashion in artistic, intellectual, and moral matters. It would be bad enough if there were nothing worse than absurdity in such fashions, but they harbor sacrilege and blasphemy as well. The liberty of this world is the most abject slavery.

The story of the prodigal is repeated by entire peoples who have abandoned the faith and obedience to the commandments of God and the Church in order to follow the principles of modern liberalism. And what have they received from liberalism in return? It has led to tyranny, to the oppression of the good by the wicked, who make whatever laws they deem fit, as dictated by their egoism, their religious indifference, or their positive hatred for all that is great and good.

In the liberalism that rises up against the authority of God and of the Church we find in its fullness the world's conception of liberty. Liberalism is essentially a doctrine that man and society have no obligation to receive divine revelation, no matter how evident its confirmatory signs may be. Each man is free to live without religion or to choose among religions the one that he prefers, as if God had no absolute right to be believed when He speaks and confirms His utterance with unmistakable signs; as if it mattered little whether God has spoken or not; as if man could be saved without faith in the divine word; as if contradictory religions could both be equally true and divine; as if states should and could remain neutral toward truth and error, religion and blasphemy, the Church and secret societies.

The heresy of liberalism consists in the denial of God's rights and the proclamation of the absolute independence of human freedom, which is thus placed above God and wears an air of charity and of generosity toward the cult and faithful of all sects alike.⁷ Here we have no partial heresy but the rejection of all religious obligations, the acting as if God had no rights whatever, as if divine authority were only a vain word. We can clearly see in a society ambitious to be called modern the aberrations stemming from the world's notion of liberty. Assuredly, if we understand liberty thus, we cannot understand how Christ was free, for He never withdrew from the divine authority and could not exempt Himself from nor escape the commandments of His Father.

ARTICLE II

CHRIST'S LIBERTY ON EARTH

Looking at Christ's liberty from below, we find it incomprehensible to us; looking at it from above, as a reflection of the divine perfections, we become enlightened by it. Christ never had freedom for evil, but only for good; His human will was the most perfect and the greatest living image of the divine liberty on earth.

From all eternity, infinitely above the false liberty of the world, the principle of all servitude, there exists a most holy liberty, the principle of all freedom. God in His infinite happiness and holiness is sovereignly impeccable and sovereignly free. If He sinned, He would no longer be God; to sin is to

⁷ *Acta Leonis XIII*, Encyclical *Libertas*, June 20, 1888, Denzinger, no. 1932; likewise Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, November 1, 1885, Denzinger, no. 1866, 1874, 1880; *Acta Pii X*, Encyclical *Pascendi*, Denzinger, nos. 2093, 1995.

turn away from the Sovereign Good. How could God turn away from Himself? He is absolutely impeccable and nevertheless infinitely free, free not in relation to Himself, because He necessarily loves Himself, but in regard to creatures, whom He can create or not, and whom He can thereafter fill with His gifts according to His own measure.

"The Spirit breathes where He will" with sovereign liberty. The divine seed which He implants in different souls has not all the same life and beauty but is given according to His good pleasure. Why was Joseph chosen rather than any other man of Nazareth to act as father and provider for Jesus? Why was he predestined before birth for this high mission? Because such was God's good pleasure. God is perfectly free to choose whom He pleases as an instrument of His mercy. He is free to call workers at the last hour to labor in His vineyard and to give them as much out of His bounty as He gives those who worked the whole day long. He defrauds no one, but freely and gratuitously gives more to some than to others. His sovereign liberty renders account to no man, and is yet plainly and fully reconciled with absolute impeccability. God cannot turn away from Himself, but He is perfectly free in regard to everything created. He has no liberty for evil, like ours, which indicates our defectibility, but He has freedom for good in absolute plenitude.

Regarded in relation to the heights of divine liberty, the mystery of Christ's human liberty becomes wonderfully illumined for us. Not only as God, but also as man, Jesus is impeccable. He could say to His enemies, "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" for not only had He never sinned in fact, but He could not sin, having no freedom to do evil.

Jesus was impeccable during His lifetime on earth for three

reasons. First of all, He was impeccable because He was the Word made flesh. If He had sinned through His human will, the sin would have been attributable to the Word made flesh. Actions are attributable to the person who places them, and a culpable act could not be attributed to a divine person. It could not be said without absurd impiety, without blasphemy, that God made man was capable of sinning. The Word could indeed bear in our stead the evil of punishment; He could be crucified for us; but He who came to blot out sin could not commit the evil of sin. "*Ecce Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi.*"

The greater the sanctity, the farther it is from all deordination and weakness; now the sanctity of Jesus consists in a personal, substantial, indissoluble, and closest possible union with divinity. As a mass of iron reddened and kept hot in a glowing furnace cannot cool off while held in the fire, so Christ's holy soul, personally united to the divinity of the Word and wholly penetrated with His splendor, could not have become sullied.

A second reason why Christ's human will was impeccable even in this world is that His soul received the fullness of habitual grace; and this fullness He could not lose, for it flowed from the personal union of His humanity with the Word as its necessary consequence. He always had, too, efficacious actual grace for the accomplishment of the commandments and counsels.

Thirdly, while on earth Jesus was impeccable because He possessed the beatific vision as the saints enjoy it in heaven. But a soul that has an immediate vision of the divine essence perceives so clearly God's infinite goodness that it cannot turn away from Him, nor prefer anything whatever to Him. Sin

is impossible in heaven, and even while in the world Christ's soul opened out upon heaven.

During His earthly life, Jesus' human will was perfectly subordinated to the divine will and therefore impeccable. His two wills were united in a theandric activity, being unified in the person of the Word acting through both natures.⁸ Because of His impeccability, which admitted no possibility of disobeying, how could Jesus be free to merit with real liberty, with something other than mere spontaneity? He had no freedom for evil such as we have as a concomitant of our defectibility, but He had full freedom for good. To turn from His Father, whom He saw face to face and loved above all things with a love greater than all the saints' in heaven, He could not. He had nonetheless liberty for good in regard to creatures, everything attractive or forbidding in the created order.

He held free mastery over sensible goods and honors. They could not captivate Him, precisely because His soul, being full of grace, adhered immovably to the Sovereign Good. He likewise rose above the threats of His enemies. They could not intimidate Him. Jesus was also at liberty to call to the apostolate His first twelve disciples rather than any other fishermen of Galilee. He freely chose Peter rather than some other apostle to be His vicar, the head of His Church, and He freely called John to a friendship of predilection.

In the very accomplishment of His inevitable duty, Jesus was free. He could not have disobeyed, nevertheless He was freely "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Of His life He said, "No man taketh it away from Me: but I lay it down of Myself. . . . This commandment have I re-

⁸ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 18.

ceived of My Father.”⁹ How was Jesus free in this instance and in what is His liberty to be found? Under one aspect, the death awaiting Him was terrible; under another, it was good for the salvation of mankind, for the deliverance of souls. Of itself it had no invincible attraction for Jesus as the face-to-face vision of His Father’s goodness had. In one way it attracted Him, but in another it repelled and terrified Him, inspiring aversion in His sensitive appetite, in His whole human nature. The will of Jesus intervened to make one rather than the other of these contrary aspects prevail, freely giving preference to the good, to heroic sacrifice. His will is completely upright, it always intervenes as it should,¹⁰ and here it interposed freely because the death of the cross was not in itself an invincibly attractive good; far from it. But the human will of Jesus intervened impeccably and infallibly because it is the will of the Word made flesh, illumined by

⁹ John 10:18.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3um: “The will of Christ, though determined to good, is not determined to this or that good. Hence it pertains to Christ, even as to the blessed, to choose with a free will confirmed in good.”

On this article see the commentaries of John of St. Thomas, on q. 15, a. 1; also of the Salmanticenses, Gonet, and Billuart. They show that in this life Christ of necessity loved the ultimate end, God seen face to face, and all the means of themselves intrinsically necessary to the last end; He chose freely the means which had only an accidental connection (in virtue of an extrinsic precept) with the last end. He had indifference of judgment in regard to the goodness of these means considered in themselves. The object, the death on the cross in particular, seemed good under one aspect, frightful under another, and to overcome this indifference, the free will had to intervene; and confirmed in goodness, it always intervened as it should have done, most holily.

It is objected that the command to die for us is irreconcilable with Christ’s liberty. The answer to be given is that a precept properly so called certainly takes away the moral freedom to act against it but does not do away with psychological freedom; on the contrary, it is given in view of an act to be performed freely and, if it should destroy psychological liberty, it would destroy the very nature of the command. Now before the command Christ had impeccable psychological liberty, a pure image of God’s freedom; and His freedom was not destroyed by His Father’s command, otherwise the command would destroy its own proper nature.

the beatific vision, full of habitual grace, ever receptive of strong and sweet actual graces, which do no violence to the will’s freedom but lead liberty to exercise itself as it should.¹¹

Christ merited by His free acts in this world because He had not yet reached the end of His mission, did not yet possess all that He was going to conquer hereafter. Merit signifies the right to a future recompense. On earth Jesus merited for Himself and for us: for Himself, His glorious resurrection, His ascension, the exaltation of His name; for us, all the graces necessary or useful for our salvation and sanctification. In heaven Jesus remains free in regard to creatures, but He no longer merits, for He has reached the end of His course and now possesses His reward, communicating it to all who do not resist Him but seek their salvation through Him.

This imperfect explanation of the mystery of Christ’s obedience and the reconciliation of His impeccability and freedom can be summed up in a few words: Jesus had no freedom for evil but He had, like His Father, full liberty for good. However obscure this mystery may remain, it contains great light for contemplation and a great practical lesson. To indicate this, let us look at the liberty of the saints and then consider what our own should be.

ARTICLE III

THE LIBERTY OF THE SAINTS

The saints enjoy liberty in regard to the things of this world because they have been freed from them by renunciation; and they are not constrained by God’s commandments

¹¹ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 15, a. 1; Ia, q. 105, a. 4; Ia IIae, q. 10, a. 4; q. 113, a. 3; *De malo*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3um.

because they bear them with love. Even as our Lord, the saints are at liberty in regard to all created goods, and the more they love God the freer they are. The stronger their love of God is, the more ably it delivers them from the slavery of the passions and of the world with its maxims and prejudices. They indeed have understood Christ's words: "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."¹² "The truth shall make you free."¹³

Divine truth delivers them from error, from anxiety, from small and foolish ideas, giving them instead the great thoughts of God. The more the saints love God, the richer they are spiritually, having no need for the vanities of the world, being indeed too great for them. They are spiritual millionaires: the promise of a few small coins cannot attract them.

The saints likewise overcome the threats of the world, the persecution of the impious, and the snares of the devil. Their enemies serve them, even in their persecution of them giving them the boon of martyrdom. Martyrdom is the transfiguration, the Thabor, of liberty, for the most terrible physical sufferings cannot bind liberty. Who was ever freer than St. Agnes or St. Cecilia bowing their heads to the swords of their executioners?

Above all, the saints become masters of themselves through the liberty coming to them from God; they are no longer, as we, prisoners of their own ego, captives to their egoism and self-love. They conquer vain complacency, and their hearts dilate in the one thought of God's glory and the salvation of souls. An immense liberty of spirit they find in the

¹² John 8: 36.

¹³ John 8: 32.

observance of our Lord's words: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."¹⁴ Who, then, can prevent the saints from seeking the kingdom of God, if God gives Himself especially to those who suffer persecution for His sake?

Who can limit or constrain the saints' freedom? Do God's commands or His grace compel them? The more the saints advance, the more liberty they find in accomplishing the Lord's commands, because they regard them not merely as precepts, as rigid laws, but as expressions of God's love for us. And they respond to them with love as well as with obedience. To follow God's ways merely to satisfy our feelings falls below obedience; to follow God's ways through the generous impulse of charity rises above mere obedience. And the more charity grows, the more the heart is enlarged in the way of the commandments: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."¹⁵

Souls can reach a degree of sanctity in which they are so possessed by God's love that they reject immediately and as if by instinct whatever would lead to sin. Although not yet confirmed in goodness, they draw near this goal, where nothing will henceforth have power to encompass their downfall. They are borne toward God with all the energy of perfect charity, yet obey Him freely and can therefore merit.

Shall we perhaps find that grace violates the liberty of the saints? Far from violating freedom, grace acts strongly, sweetly, and steadily to release and deliver them from the slavery of sin. The saints desire to subject themselves perfectly to grace and not to know any other initiative than that

¹⁴ Matt. 6: 33.

¹⁵ Ps. 118: 32.

born of grace. They no longer seem to think for themselves, to make their own deliberations, to organize their lives for their own ends, to act of themselves, but rather to abandon themselves to the divine action within them. They embrace a kind of slavery for God's sake and so attain the highest liberty possible in this life, walking in the ways called passive.

At prayer they feel themselves interiorly prompted to make God the absolute master of their hearts, to renounce everything for Him. They are not concerned more with one practice than with another but do everything for God's love, using their liberty to second the divine motion, never allowing natural eagerness to make them anticipate it. God, by His continual action on the soul, by the practices that He requires of it, by the interior trials that He sends it, insensibly purifies it of its faults and impresses upon it all that it exercises by His help, without thinking about its virtues, or even being conscious that it has any.¹⁶

No one has possessed so high a degree of holy liberty as the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was her privilege to be confirmed in goodness while still on earth; she never committed the smallest venial sin and always received such strong and sweet grace that she accomplished the will of God with utmost freedom. She was free in her obedience; she therefore merited; and she merited more by her easiest actions than all the saints together by their most heroic deeds. Surely Mary was free at

¹⁶ Father Grou, S.J., *Maximes spirituelles*, ed. 1915, p. 25, 2nd maxim. This is a remarkable chapter, in which we see that the author, probably without a distinctly Thomistic intellectual formation, comes through progress in the interior life and the direction of people of prayer, to speak of grace and fidelity to grace in the same way as St. Augustine and St. Thomas. The same striking fact can be remarked in the writings of Fathers Lallemand, De Caussade, and Surin, who follow the same direction, quite different from that of Rodriguez and Scaramelli.

the foot of the cross when saying her sorrowful *fiat*, when offering her dear Son to God, an oblation which she knew as both crucifying and salutary. She spoke her grief-filled *fiat* on Calvary with the same freedom that she pronounced her joyful *fiat* at the annunciation. Grace drew her to it strongly but wiped away none of its loving suffering, even increasing it to proportions that no other creature has ever endured on earth.

In heaven the saints, confirmed in goodness by the beatific vision, love God of necessity, because they are invincibly attracted to infinite Goodness unveiled. Their beatific love is sovereignly spontaneous but necessitated in the sense of being above liberty and not below it like mechanical action.¹⁷ However, in heaven the saints freely carry out God's orders in regard to creatures, having in such things freedom for good, not for evil.¹⁸ They no longer merit, not because they lack freedom in obeying God's commands, but because they have reached the end of their course, already enjoy their supreme reward, and have nothing more to merit.

Our practical conclusion should be to ask our Lord to take away from us our freedom for evil, which is only an aspect of our defectibility, and give us more freedom for good. Our whole desire should be never to abuse our freedom, to make it as much as possible like God's, like Christ's, by loving the good and hating evil. The more strongly we are drawn to the good through our growth in charity, the more like to God we shall be, for He is necessitated by His nature to the good.¹⁹ Divine truth, the commandments of the Lord, and

¹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 4, a. 4; q. 5, a. 4.

¹⁸ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3um.

¹⁹ Grou, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

His grace serve to liberate us more and more from our servitude to sin and self.

During our lifetime we always run the unhappy risk of throwing off our Lord's yoke, no matter how light it may be, and resisting His grace. This misfortune is the more to be feared when our will pretends to be its own master instead of abandoning itself to divine Providence; for the perfection of the will consists in placing itself in God's hands, in making use of its own proper activity only to become more dependent on Him, in being always docile to grace. Let us offer our liberty to Jesus through Mary and try never to take it back again; in this holy slavery we shall find deliverance and a most sure road to heaven.²⁰

²⁰ Rom. 6: 20, 22: "For when you were the servants of sin, you were free men to justice. . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting." Slavery to sin is real slavery and means liberty only to the world, whereas the slavery of love for God is true freedom, the liberty of the children of God. Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 183, a. 4, c. See also Blessed Grignon de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and the excellent summary which he himself has given of it in *The Secret of Mary*.

CHAPTER XVII

MARY, MODEL OF THE LIFE OF REPARATION

Some souls that have entered the unitive way are called to a life of reparation. Having reached perfect love through the cross, they are led by love to accept the cross anew, not only to promote their own purification but to make reparation for the sins of their fellow men and, through prayer and immolation, to obtain for them the graces necessary for salvation.

The Blessed Virgin is the eminent model of such souls. She has merited the title of co-redemptrix¹ and universal mediatrix² under, in, with, and through our Lord. In the encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor* Pope Pius XI willed to consecrate the title of Mary Reparatrix and to confirm the doctrine of the universal mediation of all graces.

We wish to speak of the fruitfulness of Mary's reparative sorrows and, to gain a better understanding of their worth, we shall consider them in relation to the greatest grace that the Mother of God can obtain for us, the grace of final perseverance, the consummation of the life of union and the

¹ Benedict XV ratified this title by saying that Mary, in union with Christ, has redeemed mankind: "*ut dici merito queat ipsam cum Christo humanum genus redemisse.*" Letter of March 22, 1918, *Acta Apost. Sed.*, X, 182.

² This title has been approved by Pius IX in the bull *Ineffabilis*, December 8, 1854; by Pius X, in the encyclical *Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904; by Benedict XV in the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, January 21, 1921, approving the feast of Mary Mediatrix.

crown of every Christian life. The second part of the Hail Mary asks this grace for us: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Every Christian perceives at least dimly the relationship of Mary's suffering to the grace of a good death, but the more we enter into Mary's sorrowful and immaculate heart, the more we see that the depth of her love for the agonizing Jesus has made her the strong and tender helper of all the dying who implore her aid. Our last sigh should express a holy love and a holy hatred: love of God and hatred for sin. Whence shall we draw final contrition and love stronger than death, if not from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the sorrowful heart of His Blessed Mother?

ARTICLE I

MARY MEDIATRIX

AND THE GRACE OF FINAL PERSEVERANCE

To understand the full worth of Mary's mediation, let us first consider the greatest grace asked through her and with her by those who seek to make reparation for sinners—the grace of a good death. Let us see in what it consists and how it can be obtained.

To die well we need grace. Children studying their catechism know that to be saved we must be in the state of grace at the moment of death. So simply expressed, this lofty doctrine infinitely surpasses all the speculations of scholars and philosophers about death. When our body loses its powers, its life, it begins to corrupt and soon falls into dust, yet we have within us a principle of intellectual and moral life which

cannot die: a spiritual soul. Right reason has the native ability to affirm this truth, and some non-Christian philosophers have taught it. From a purely natural point of view, philosophers have even been able to state the conditions of a good death, describing for us the just or wise man at the end of a life ennobled by the will to do his full duty as manifested and dictated by right reason. And the unbelieving think that we have no need of grace to die thus, that the will's natural energy suffices for it and sometimes rises even to heroism.

But in an order far higher than unaided reason, faith tells us what the catechism teaches: that to die a good death we must be in the state of grace. What does this mean? It means that it is not enough for us to die in the love of our family and our country: we must die in God's love, in conformity to the will of our heavenly Father, who calls us to supernatural happiness, to the life of eternity, and gives to all souls of good will the grace to come to Him. He Himself rectifies the will, comes to its aid, and finally confirms it in goodness.

At death the germ of the life of heaven, *semen gloriae*, must exist in the soul. What an astonishing and sublime contrast: at the moment of death just when the body is losing its powers, growing cold and beginning to corrupt, the soul must, if we are to be saved, be living not only the natural life of a clear-sighted intellect and an energetic will but the divine life, a sharing in God's own inner life. We must die as Christians and have sanctifying grace in the very essence of our souls, in the intellect the supernatural light of faith, in the will the hope of heaven and the love of God above all things, charity. Through Jesus death becomes then only an entrance into eternal life. As soon as the last minute of our earthly existence is over, we have an interior and positive dis-

cernment of the state of our conscience, perceiving what is forever our due, according to our merits or demerits.

We should remember that almost all the soul's life is to be passed in the world to come. How can sixty or eighty years here on earth be compared to millions and millions of years, or rather, to a life without end, happy or unhappy, to be spent beyond the grave? Nothing is more important for each of us than to die a Christian death in God's love and in true repentance. How precious is that sweet and strong grace that will lead us to perform our last act of contrition and confirm us in charity: the grace of a good death, or of final perseverance! Without it, we are lost for all eternity; with it, heaven opens to us or will be opened to us, after we have been purified, to remain ours forever.

We seldom think seriously of the grace of final perseverance. Many of us live in foolish recklessness, believing that plenty of time still remains to be converted, putting it off until later, until that moment perhaps when, after we have abused all the divine helps and when consciousness itself has gone, we can no longer give our attention to the matter of salvation. Life on earth is like a great train in which people settle down comfortably, chatting, playing games, sleeping, and doing all so successfully that they pay no attention to the speed at which the train is traveling. In their journey toward eternity, many fail to notice how fast time is flying, and those without hope make no effort to prepare for death but try to divert themselves to keep from thinking about it. Sometimes others with the manners of Christian living manifest an assurance resembling presumption rather than real hope, apparently believing that they have merited the grace of a good death.

Can we claim to merit the last grace in the true sense of "merit"? Merit properly so called signifies a strict right to a reward. Have we a right to the grace of a good death because we have lived a Christian life for twenty, forty, sixty years or more? Because of our merits can we be assured of final perseverance? Here we have a grave question, concerning which Pelagians and Protestants have both been mistaken, although in contrary ways.³

Here as always the true faith has the simplicity of wonderful depth. Our Lord foretold to us: "The charity of many shall grow cold. But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved."⁴ "Then two shall be in one field: one shall be taken, and one shall be left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill: one shall be taken, and one shall be left."⁵ St. Paul adds: "Wherefore, my dearly beloved . . . with fear and trembling work out your salvation. For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will."⁶ "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."⁷ Let him place his trust in the Almighty, alone capable of preserving the just in simplicity and above reproach in the midst of a corrupt and perverse world.⁸

Holy Church, warning us against presumption and despair, tells us that, although we should hope firmly in God, with-

³ The Pelagians said that we can merit, in the strict sense of the term, both the first and last grace. The Protestants hold that to be saved faith without meritorious works suffices, and that in this life a man can be absolutely certain, without any special revelation, of his own predestination and can, moreover, be saved even without meriting.

⁴ Matt. 14: 12.

⁵ Matt. 24: 40.

⁶ Phil. 2: 12.

⁷ I Cor. 10: 12.

⁸ Phil. 2: 15; Rom. 14: 4.

out a special revelation none of us can have absolute certitude of persevering until the end.⁹ Of course the good God will never first abandon us, but we ourselves can abandon Him; we can be unfaithful to grace and relax in our struggle against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Theology as taught by St. Augustine¹⁰ and St. Thomas¹¹ renders Holy Scripture and the Church's teaching more explicit by adding that we cannot merit the very principle of merit itself. Now the principle of merit consists in the state of grace and perseverance in that state. Therefore, just as we cannot merit the first grace of conversion, we cannot strictly merit the last. But gifts that we are unable to merit in the strict sense, such as the grace of conversion and the still more precious grace of final perseverance, we can, and even should, ask for and dispose ourselves for. Not to pray for it, not to prepare ourselves for it, no matter what the quietists may say, is foolish and fatal negligence. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; . . . knock, and it shall be opened to you."¹² Our Lord Himself has taught us to say in the Our Father, "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," that we may persevere.

Can we then by prayer infallibly obtain the grace of a good death? Theology teaches that prayer made under certain conditions obtains for us infallibly the goods necessary for salvation and therefore final grace. But what are the conditions for infallibly efficacious prayer? When begging the necessary goods for salvation it must be humble, trusting, and

⁹ Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 13 and can. 16.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae*, chaps. 6, 17; *De praedestin. sanctorum*, chap. 11.

¹¹ 1a 2ae, q. 114, a. 9.

¹² Matt. 7: 7.

persevering.¹³ Here our weakness reappears: we can fail to persevere in prayer as well as in meritorious works. Bossuet says with much depth: "God so desires to keep us from succumbing to the temptation not to pray that He delivers us from the evil of losing the taste and the will to prayer. Is there any time in life when we experience more sensibly the need of grace that lays hold of the heart than in prayer? The greatest, the most efficacious, and the most gratuitous of all graces is the grace of persevering in prayer without ever giving up . . . despite times of dryness and many temptations to abandon it all."¹⁴

We need help until the end, not only to merit, but also to pray. From whom shall we ask help? From the good God, the author of all grace, surely; from our Lord, who has shed His blood for our salvation. He Himself has told us: "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name."¹⁵ And as Jesus is our Mediator with the Father, Mary is our mediatrix with Jesus. "God wills to give all His gifts, even the gift of final perseverance, to those who ask Him for it as He wills to be asked,"¹⁶—through the intercession of the Savior and His Blessed Mother. We ought now to speak of Mary's mediation in order that we may show how she is the model of all souls dedicated to the work of reparation.

¹³ 2a 2ae, q. 83, a. 15, ad 2um.

¹⁴ Bossuet, *Défense de la tradition et des saints pères*, Bk. XII, chaps. 10, 8. We say the same during holy Mass before Communion: "Make me always adhere to Thy commandments and never suffer me to be separated from Thee."

¹⁵ John 16: 23 f.

¹⁶ Bossuet, *Instr. sur les états d'oraison*, Bk. IV, at the beginning (against the quietists). Cf. St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae*, chap. 6: "Hoc Dei donum suppliciter emereri potest."

ARTICLE II

THE MYSTERY OF MARY'S SORROWS

One of the most profound, most touching, most luminous, and most fruitful mysteries of the Blessed Virgin's life is the mystery of her sorrows. Why is it that Mary, more than any other creature, can obtain for us the grace of final contrition? Because, holy as she is, she has suffered the gravest evil due to sinners for their chastisement. Let us enter a little way into the mystery of Mary's loving heart and look upon the cause and fruitfulness of her sufferings.

The cause of Mary's sufferings

Every Christian accustomed to making the way of the cross knows that the basic cause of Mary's sorrows, as well as of Christ's, was sin. Blessed are those simple souls, for whom this fundamental truth is not merely a formula committed to memory but a truth of life. Blessed are those who experience true sorrow for their sins. Of them our Lord has said, "Blessed are those who mourn."¹⁷ Only grace can produce this blessed suffering in us. We suffer from sicknesses that try the body, still more perhaps from wounds to our self-love, our vanity, and our pride. We also suffer in an entirely natural way from the ingratitude of men, from injustices that afflict our family and our country. But we suffer far too little because of sin, from our own sins so far as they offend God.

On reflection we tell ourselves with truth that sin comprises the greatest of evils. Whether it goes by the name of

¹⁷ Matt. 5: 5.

pride, avarice, envy, or lust, it strikes into our very soul and reaches all its energies; as a result it causes all the disorder that we deplore in families and societies and the sometimes exceedingly bitter struggles between classes and peoples. Despite our knowledge of the fact, we experience no really great sorrow for our personal sins, by which we contribute our share to the general disorder; our light-mindedness and inconstancy prevent us from becoming too conscious of evil, and its depth escapes us. It works like some dread malady that we carry around all unconsciously in our vital organs the while we cry over a scratch.

To experience vividly the good suffering of contrition we must have a deep love of God, whom sin offends; we need also an earnest desire for the salvation of souls, that sin leads astray from their last end. The saints suffered because of sin in the measure of their love for God and neighbor. St. Catherine of Siena recognized souls in the state of mortal sin by a most obnoxious odor which she perceived in their presence. A Carmelite, learning of the publication of Renan's work attacking Christ's divinity, almost fainted from grief.¹⁸ But if you desire to grasp how far suffering caused by sin can go, ask Mary's heart for the secret. Her sorrow was measured by her love for God, for her Son, and for souls.

Who can measure Mary's love for God? The most ardent charity of the greatest saints, St. Paul, St. John, cannot be compared with Mary's. Let us remember that, from the first instant of her immaculate conception, she who was to be called the Mother of the Savior received a fullness of grace and of love surpassing the grace of all the saints and angels together. As a diamond is worth countless less precious stones,

¹⁸ *Vie de Sœur Marie-Aimée de Jésus*, Carmelite, Part I, p. 310.

Mary from the first moment of her life surpassed all other souls in charity. Her initial fullness of grace never left off growing because of her perfect fidelity; no slightest venial sin checked the great upsurge of her love. Each of her meritorious acts, more fervent than the one preceding, multiplied the intensity of her charity, a wonderful development beyond our powers to conceive.¹⁹ If the Blessed Virgin loved God with such fervor, how much she must have suffered from the gravest of all evils, which our frivolity prevents from troubling us at all!

Her intellect illuminated with supernatural light, Mary saw that all souls are called to hymn God's glory with praise incomparably greater than the stars of heaven. Each soul should be like a ray of the divinity, a spiritual beam of thought and love. Are not our minds made to know God, our hearts to love Him? Whereas the stars follow faithfully the path fixed for them by Providence and tell the glory of their Creator, innumerable souls, each worth a world in itself, turn aside from God. Instead of a reflection of the divinity, a radiation of the glory of the Most High, three horrible wounds are to be found in thousands of hearts: concupiscence of the flesh, as if carnal love alone were desirable; concupiscence of the eyes, as if no glory but fortune and honor existed; the pride of life, as if we had no Creator and no God other than ourselves. Mary sees evil in souls, as we ourselves see purulent sores in a sick body. The perfection wrought in her through the Immaculate Conception makes her extraordinarily sensitive to all sharp griefs, and to sin particularly.

First and foremost, however, the Mother of our Savior has seen, without any possible illusion, the greatest of all crimes

¹⁹ Hugon, *La Mère de la divine grâce* (Paris, Lethielleux), pp. 122 f.

planned and carried out, the sin against the divine liberating Light, the sin against the Author of salvation, deicide. The cause of Mary's sorrows was the whole mass of all sins taken together, of all revolts, of all sacrilegious furies, brought in one instant to a climax and implacably turned against our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of Mary's love for her Son, not only beloved but rightly adored. Recall that she had miraculously conceived Him, that she loved Him with a mother's heart, a virgin's heart, the purest and most tender heart that ever existed, that she loved Him not only as her only child but as her God with a supernatural intensity of love that we cannot even conjecture. Realize that Mary knew full well the causes of the crucifixion; the human causes, the animosity of the Jews, the chosen people, her people; the higher causes, the redemption of sinful and sinning souls; then you will catch a glimpse of the interior sorrows of the Virgin Mary.

There was no need for another cross for her, as Bossuet says, her Son's cross sufficed: love made her one with Him. All Christ's physical sufferings she felt in her keen affections, enduring more from the wounds in His hands and feet than any stigmatist has ever suffered. All the Savior's moral sufferings, those that came from men, their treason and mockery; those that came from hell; and those that came from God, the just judge: Mary experienced them all according to the measure of her love.

Mary's heart, like Christ's whole bruised and crushed being, was transformed with anguish by the sins of mankind, being altered more than the bodies and hearts of the sick, the dying, the martyred. Mary became the queen of martyrs because, after Jesus, she has endured the greatest martyrdom

of heart. Truly, as the aged Simeon had foretold, a sword pierced her breast; the thrust of the lance that opened the Savior's heart entered her own soul as the final outrage to the God-man on the cross and as a symbol of all those later to strike at Him in the Eucharist.

To get a vivid notion of the Virgin Mary's sufferings we would need to share with the saints those crucifying graces that give souls a participation in the Savior's cross. St. Catherine de Ricci, for example, endured for twelve years an ecstasy of suffering beginning every Friday and lasting twenty-eight hours, during which she relived the Passion. Whenever it began she used to tremble and beg for grace, and our Lord would answer her that her sufferings would be accepted for a sinner whom she had recommended to His mercy. Then she would consent to make that terrible way of the cross again. Yet the sufferings of St. Catherine de Ricci fell far short of the Blessed Virgin's: all that rent the heart of Jesus was re-echoed in her own, and she would have died of such moral torture had she not been sustained supernaturally with exceptional grace. We who ask for the grace of a good death, for a holy sorrow for sin, should have recourse to our Savior's Mother. Her sufferings are fruitful for us in a measure we scarcely even suspect.

The fruitfulness of Mary's sufferings

In the order of salvation what really serves to draw us nearer to God? The progress of human science, of art, of industry, and of social works, certainly has value in their own order, assuring us of the necessities of life; but everything of this kind remains far inferior to the life of the soul. What counts as far as souls are concerned is merit, sacrifice, and

prayer. Now the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin on Calvary have an inexhaustible fecundity for us, precisely because of their triple coredemptive value of merit, sacrifice, and prayer.

Her sufferings merit for us because in union with our Lord she has endured martyrdom of heart for our salvation and sanctification. All that the Word made flesh merited for us in strict justice, the Blessed Virgin merited for us by a certain congruity founded on the charity uniting her to the Most High. His Holiness Pope Pius X²⁰ approved the common teaching of theologians that Mary, in union with our Lord, has merited for us *de congruo* what Christ Himself has merited for us *de condigno*.

Who can appreciate the value of such merit as this, measured as it is by the degree of charity in Mary's immaculate heart? Because of her fullness of grace, the Mother of the Savior acquired more merit by her simplest actions than all the martyrs together achieved by their most difficult and painful deeds. How then could we ever estimate the value of Mary's compassion at the foot of the cross? To gain some hint of its worth, let us consider the three theological virtues as found in Mary's soul.

No greater act of faith than Mary's on Calvary is conceivable: in the deep gloom of that day which has been called the hour of darkness, when the faith of the apostles themselves wavered, when Jesus, humanly speaking, seemed wholly defeated and His work forever brought to nothing; when Heaven Itself seemed to make no answer to the entreaty of the Crucified, Mary never for a moment stopped believing that her Son was the Savior of mankind. When He spoke His last words, "*Consummatum est,*" the Virgin

²⁰ Encyclical *Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904.

understood, in the fullness of her faith, that the work of salvation was finished by her Son's terrible annihilation, that even then her agonizing Jesus was victorious over sin and in three days would conquer death, the result of sin. Her great act of faith consisted in seeing the hand of God, even more than that, God's intervention, where the best and most believing of men could not see anything but darkness and desolation. She offers us a great lesson for our times of deepest grief, when all seems lost, yet when everything can be saved by a great faith, drawing down upon us the words of resurrection, capable of producing what they signify.

Just when all seemed hopeless, Mary made a supreme act of hope as well. She understood the full meaning of the words spoken to the good thief: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise," and she saw heaven opening for the elect.

She made the greatest act of charity, loving God to the extent of offering Him her innocent and tormented Son, loving Him above all things at the very moment when He had struck her in her greatest and deepest affection, in the very object which she rightfully adored.

Her sacrifice equaled her merit, and both had inestimable value. Jesus alone, of course, can offer reparation equal to the offense of mortal sin; but in union with Jesus, the eternal priest, Mary said her *fiat* in sorrow just as she had said it in joy on the day of the Annunciation. In union with her Son she too became a victim for us, a victim conscious of the gravity of the offenses to be expiated, a victim of boundless generosity, not only giving her whole self but offering her only Son, far, far dearer to her than life itself. Because she was an absolutely innocent victim and had no need to do reparation for herself, Mary Immaculate offered to God an

expiation all the more acceptable to Him and profitable for mankind. Her whole spiritual treasure has become our heritage, and the Church unceasingly applies it to us through indulgences.

The sufferings of Mary had an inexhaustible fecundity. She bore indeed the pains of spiritual childbirth when Jesus confided to her the motherhood of our race in the person of St. John: "Son," said Jesus to John, "behold thy mother," and to Mary, "Woman, behold thy Son."²¹ Uttered from the height of the cross, these words of our Savior produced, as His sacramental words do, what they signify. They were spoken by the Word made flesh about to die for us yet possessed of the same power as ever to touch and enliven hearts at will. His words created a close spiritual bond between Mary and John, giving Mary a deep and wholly motherly affection for John and all souls ransomed by the sacrifice of the cross, an affection reaching out and enfolding them all.

Calvary for Mary as well as for Jesus was truly the *consummatum est* of her mission as co-redemptrix. All who have a true devotion to Mary should say of the Mother of Sorrows: "I know nothing save Mary, who compassionated the Crucified"; just as St. Paul said of the Savior: "For I judge not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."²²

In heaven Mary, like her Son, no longer merits, no longer suffers to offer atonement to God for us, but she never ceases praying for us. Of her as of Jesus it can be truly said that she is "always living to make intercession for us."²³ She prays

²¹ John 19: 27.

²² I Cor. 2: 2.

²³ Heb. 7: 25.

that we may be accorded all the helps merited by the sacrifice of the cross, and the prayer of the Virgin is an enlightened and universal prayer, for she knows all the graces that we need because she is our Mother and has received from God a universal mission to help us all on the way of salvation. Her prayer is fervent and extends to the last sinner without losing any of its intensity. She is sovereignly good and prays for all men, yet she prays especially for those who offer no resistance to her good inspirations and faithfully recommend themselves to her, looking upon them with particular tenderness, interceding for them more pressingly, more absolutely, until she finally obtains what she asks and brings them safe home to the harbor of salvation.

The graces that she obtains, she dispenses. She herself being the ideal of the predestined, Mary progressively forms the elect,²⁴ distributing those supernatural helps during life that prepare for and assure a good death and at the end exerting her patronage as the advocate and help of the dying. At the hour of death, that supreme moment when the soul's destiny is decided, the Blessed Virgin Mary bears in mind the love that has been shown to her, recalling how her servants have said to her time and time again: "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." She holds them up in the struggle of their last agony and defends them against the devil. She whose heart holds a peerless hatred for sin inspires them with the grief of true contrition and brings them to make an act of perfect charity, and when they have died she watches over them in purgatory that she may lead them at last into heaven.

²⁴ Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, chap. 5, art. 2.

It is said that St. John of God, who had great devotion to Mary throughout his life, longed to feel her near him in his last agony but could not and gently complained to her for having left him alone. She deigned to appear to him and addressed to him the consoling words reported to us by the Bollandists: "John, it is not my way to abandon my servants at such a time."

If she does not abandon saints, neither does she forsake sinners, leaving no stone unturned to bring them to repentance, to open up their minds to let in confidence. There must be very few last minute conversions not due to some practice in honor of the Blessed Virgin, the wearing of the scapular, the recitation of the Hail Mary, the Angelus, the Memorare, the Rosary. In recent years a certain extremely frivolous writer finally acceded to his mother's insistent requests and promised to say a daily Hail Mary. He kept his promise, but outside of that prayer his life held nothing that would dispose him for a good death; yet at the last moment he made his confession and died like a Christian. Many times during the last war Mary came to the help of dying soldiers. It is told that a young Frenchman in his agony was saying the Ave Maria in Latin but could not finish it and a dying German soldier beside him took up the prayer and completed it. Mary watched over them both and led them to make the supernatural sacrifice of their lives, that she might bring them to a better world. With our Blessed Mother helping us, death is no longer death but, as Bossuet says, the beginning of deliverance, the doorway to immortality.

What can we conclude but that devotion to Mary is a sign of predestination and that the closer we are bound to this

distributor of grace the nearer we are to our Lord; the more united we are to her, the more we receive of the divine influence? For devotion to Mary to become a guaranty of salvation it must be more than lip-service prayers and external practices that leave the passions unchecked: it must be a work of imitation. The mediation of the Mother of God surely calls for cooperation on our part. The best means of assuring that we give our cooperation is to live in union with Mary, meditating on the joyous, the sorrowful, and the glorious mysteries of her holy life, particularly recalling her sorrows in order to sanctify our own trials, which we often meet irrationally, accept morosely, and carry without profit. Let us live by our devotion to Mary, consecrating ourselves to her as Blessed Grignon de Montfort counsels, offering her all that is incommunicable in our merits that she make it fruitful, and all that is communicable that she may use it according to her good pleasure for the benefit of erring and suffering souls.²⁵

In this spirit, let us often repeat the invocation, "Sorrowful and immaculate heart of Mary, pray for us." Because Mary's heart was immaculate and pure it suffered so much for the sins of mankind. Sorrowful heart, overflowing with divine life, pray for us. We do well to become used to saying this invocation, for then at death it will come back to mind spontaneously and become the expression of our last sigh. Then Mary will lead us to make the sacrifice of our life in a spirit

²⁵ In our good works there is something incommunicable, merit properly so called, merit *de condigno*, and also something communicable to other souls, the merit of congruity, or *de congruo*, and in addition to this, prayer for our neighbor and satisfaction for the punishment due to sin. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 6. If after making the act of oblation we forget to pray for our neighbor, Mary will be the first to remind us of it.

of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and supplication, uniting our intention with all the Masses being celebrated throughout the world.²⁶

²⁶ His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV, in a letter to the director of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of a Holy Death, strongly recommended that the faithful have Masses said to obtain the grace of a good death; this greatest grace we cannot merit but only obtain by prayer, and the greatest of all prayers is that which our Lord continues by offering Himself on the altar through the ministry of His priests: "*Idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui se ipsum tunc in cruce obtulit, sola offerendi ratione diversa*" (Council of Trent, Denzinger, no. 940).

CHAPTER XVIII

ST. JOSEPH: MODEL OF THE HIDDEN LIFE
AND FIRST AMONG THE SAINTS

"For he that is the lesser among you
all, he is the greater."

Luke 9: 48

After our Lord and His Blessed Mother we can find no more perfect model of the life of union than St. Joseph. The doctrine which holds that after Mary he has always been more closely united to our Lord than any other saint tends to become more and more commonly accepted in the Church. It fearlessly declares the humble carpenter greater in grace and beatitude than the patriarchs, Moses, the greatest of the prophets, St. John the Baptist, and all the apostles, including St. Peter, St. John, and St. Paul, and, with all the more reason, proclaims him higher in sanctity than the greatest martyrs and doctors of the Church.

This doctrine was taught by Gerson¹ and by St. Bernardine of Siena,² and became more and more widely held from the sixteenth century on, being accepted as true by St. Teresa, St. Francis de Sales, Suarez,³ and later by St. Alphonsus Liguori and many others.⁴

¹ *Sermo in nativitatem Virginis Mariae*, 4th consideration.

² *Sermo 1 de S. Joseph*, chap. 3, *Opera* (Lyons, 1650), IV, 254.

³ *In Summam S. Thomae*, IIIa, q. 29, disp. 8, sec. 1.

⁴ Isidore de Isolaniis, O.P., *Summa de donis S. Joseph*, 1522 (new ed.; Rome: Berthier, 1897); Ch. Sauv , *Saint Joseph intime* (Paris, 1920); Cardinal Lepicier,

Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Quanquam pluries* wrote that the dignity of the Mother of God is indeed so sublime that nothing higher could be created, but as Joseph was united to the Blessed Virgin by the conjugal bond he no doubt approaches closer than anyone else the supereminent dignity by which the Mother of God so far surpasses all other creatures. Conjugal union is in fact the greatest of all unions; because of its very nature it brings about a reciprocal communication of good between the two spouses. If therefore God gave St. Joseph to the Virgin as her spouse, He most certainly did not give him to her merely for her material support, as a witness to her virginity, and the guardian of her honor, but He must also have made him share through the marriage bond in the eminent dignity which she had received.⁵ Since Mary surpassed in dignity all other creatures, as the encyclical just cited says, does it not follow that Joseph's pre-eminence should be understood not only as exceeding all other saints' but also even the angels'? We cannot assert it with certainty. Let us content ourselves by expressing the doctrine more and more widely accepted throughout the Church by saying that of all the saints Joseph is the highest in heaven, standing among the angels and archangels, nearest Jesus and Mary. His mission in regard to the holy family has made him the patron, protector, and defender of the universal Church; to him, in a special sense, Christians of all generations are confided, as the beautiful litanies summarizing his prerogatives show.

We wish to recall here the principle that serves as a basis

Tractatus de Sancto Joseph (Paris, 1908); M. A. Michel's article, "Saint Joseph" in the *Dictionnaire de th ologie catholique*; especially Sinibaldi, *La Grandezza di San Giuseppe* (Rome, 1927), pp. 36 ff.

⁵ Encyclical letter *Quanquam pluries*, August 15, 1899.

for the doctrine of St. Joseph's pre-eminence, which for five centuries has been gaining wider and wider acceptance; in this way we shall see him as a perfect model of the hidden life.

*The requisite for an exceptional
divine mission: exceptional sanctity*

The general principle used by the theology to explain revelation and show us what Christ's fullness of grace, Mary's sanctity, and the apostles' faith should be, rests on their exceptional divine mission, a mission demanding a proportional sanctity. St. Joseph's case bears a similarity to theirs.

God's works are perfect, particularly those which He raises up immediately and exclusively. No disorder, no disproportion, can be found in them. The whole harmony of the divine work of creation offers us an instance in case.⁶ We have other examples in God's great servants raised up by Him in an exceptional and immediate way to restore some divine work marred by sin. "And God created man to His own image."⁷ "He hath purposed . . . in the dispensation of the fullness of time, to re-establish all things in Christ."⁸

We get a better grasp of the truth and importance of this revealed and self-evident principle by considering as a contrast what often happens in human affairs. Not infrequently the incapable and improvident occupy high offices and cause much harm to those whom they govern. At times we would be incensed at this condition if we did not remember that

⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q. 94, a. 3.

⁷ Gen. 1: 27.

⁸ Eph. 1: 10.

God compensates for such things by hidden and often heroic acts of sanctity or if we forgot that each of us must say *mea culpa* for our own negligence in the exercise of offices and works entrusted to us, failing so frequently that we finish by no longer noticing our shortcomings. But disorder is disorder and inadequacy is inadequacy and nothing like either can be found in those immediately chosen and directly prepared by God Himself to act as His exceptional ministers in the work of redemption. God gives them a sanctity proportionate to their task, for He performs all things according to measure, and disorder or disproportion cannot be found in works properly divine, which have God alone as their author.

We see our chief example of this truth in the sacred soul of Jesus. From the first instant of its creation, it received an absolute fullness of grace, because it was united as intimately as possible to the Word of God, the source of all supernatural life, and because it was to communicate the divine life to us through the light of the gospel and by the infinite merits of the sacrifice of the cross: "And of His fullness we all have received. . . . No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."⁹ St. Thomas considers that this Gospel text and others similar to it signify not only the fullness of grace but glory or the beatific vision, enjoyed by our Savior in this world that He might lead us, as the Master of masters, to eternal life.¹⁰

In virtue of the same principle, if Mary was to be fittingly

⁹ John 1: 16-18.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 7, a. 9; q. 9, a. 2.

the Mother of God, she had to be "full of grace,"¹¹ preserved from original sin, and associated with Jesus in all His sufferings and all His glories. Because of her unique mission in the world, the Mother of God should draw as near as possible to the Word made flesh in the two great mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption. She should receive more grace than any other creature, whether angel or saint, because she stands nearest the source of all grace.¹² For the same reason theology teaches us that the apostles, because they were more closely associated with our Lord than the saints who came after them, grasped the mysteries of faith more perfectly than they.¹³ In St. Thomas' eyes it would be bold to deny this, but we must remember that he was comparing the apostles only to the saints who came after them and not to St. Joseph or St. John the Baptist.¹⁴ St. Joseph's mission seems greater than the apostles', greater too than the precursor's. His vocation had a uniqueness comparable to Mary's, and his exceptional destiny leads us to believe that he drew nearer to the source of all grace and is more closely united to our Lord than either the apostles or the precursor.

St. Joseph's exceptional mission

To St. John the Baptist was entrusted the task of announcing the immediate coming of the Messiah. It can be said then

¹¹ Luke 1: 28.

¹² Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 27, a. 3, 5.

¹³ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 7, ad 4um.

¹⁴ In *Ep. ad Rom.* 8: 23 about these words, "*Nos ipsi primitias Spiritus habentes*"; "*Spiritum Sanctum et tempore prius et caeteris abundantius Apostoli habuerunt.*" Likewise in *Ep. ad Ephes.* 4: 11 about these words, "*Et ipse dedit quosdam quidem apostolos, quosdam autem prophetas, alios vero evangelistas, alios autem pastores et doctores.*"

that he was the greatest precursor of Jesus in the Old Testament; and it is in this sense that St. Thomas understands our Lord's pronouncement in St. Matthew's Gospel: "Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of woman a greater than John the Baptist."¹⁵ But our Lord immediately adds: "Yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." The kingdom of heaven is the Church on earth and in heaven, the New Testament surpassing the perfection of the Old although some just men of the Old have been holier than many of the New.¹⁶ And in the Church who is "he that is the lesser"? These mysterious words have received more than one interpretation. They make us think of words spoken later by Jesus: "For he that is the lesser among you all, he is the greater."¹⁷ The lesser means the most humble, the servant of all,¹⁸ and therefore, because of the connection and proportion of the virtues, the one who has the greatest charity.¹⁹ And who in the Church

¹⁵ St. Thomas, In *Matthaeum* 11: 11. Here St. Thomas regards St. John the Baptist as the greatest of the great precursors of the Lord. The fact that he has this office seems sufficient to explain why he comes immediately after Mary and the angels in the litany of the saints. He brings the Old Testament to an end and announces the New. For those favoring this interpretation of Matt. 11: 11, see Lagrange, *Evangile selon S. Matt.*, p. 222 (Paris: Lecoffre, 1923); *Evangile selon S. Luc*, p. 221; Knabenbauer, *Evangelium secundum Matthaeum*, I, 429-31.

¹⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, In *Matthaeum* 11: 11.

Independently of the personal merits of the different servants of God, the New Testament, especially as it flowers in the glory of heaven, is certainly a more perfect state than the Old. Now St. John the Baptist stands on the confines of the two. On this point consult the exegetes referred to in the preceding note, M. A. Michel's article on St. Joseph in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, col. 1515, where these references together with some others are recommended, for example, Fillion, *Evangile selon S. Matthieu* (Paris, 1878), p. 222, and D. Buzy, *Saint Jean Baptiste* (Paris, 1922), Part III, chap. 3.

¹⁷ Luke 9: 48.

¹⁸ Cf. Luke 22: 26: "He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serveth."

¹⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 66, a. 2.

is the most humble? He who was neither apostle nor evangelist nor martyr—exteriorly at least—nor pontiff nor priest, nor doctor, but who knew and loved Christ Jesus certainly no less than the apostles, the Evangelists, the martyrs, the popes and doctors of the Church: the humble artisan of Nazareth, the humble Joseph.

The apostles were called to make the Savior known, to preach the gospel that men might be saved. Their mission, like John the Baptist's, belongs to the order of grace necessary for the salvation of all; but an order still higher than the order of grace exists, one constituted by the very mystery of the Incarnation, the order of the hypostatic or personal union of the humanity of Jesus with the very Word of God. Mary's unique mission of divine motherhood adjoins this order, and Joseph's hidden mission also, in a sense, has a like position. This argument has been put forth in different forms by St. Bernard,²⁰ St. Bernardine of Siena,²¹ the Dominican Isidore de Isolani,²² Suarez,²³ and other authors of more recent times.²⁴

Bossuet expresses all this with lovely clarity in his first

²⁰ S. Bernardus, *Homil. 2, super Missus est, prope finem*: "Fidelis, inquam, servus et prudens, quem constituit Dominus suae Matris solatium, suae carnis nutritium, solum denique in terris magni consilii coadjutorem fidelissimum."

²¹ St. Bernardine of Siena, *Serm. I de S. Joseph, op. cit.* In a beautiful passage telling of the election of St. Joseph, his office and graces, he says: "Si compares eum ad totam Ecclesiam Christi, nonne iste est homo electus et specialis, per quem et sub quo Christus est ordinate et honeste introductus in mundum?"

²² In 1522 Isidore de Isolani, O.P., in a work highly praised by Benedict XIV, *Summa de donis Sancti Joseph, ed. cit.*, compares St. Joseph's prerogatives to the apostles and finds them greater, summing them up in these beautiful words: "Proprietates vero sancti Joseph fuere deponatio Reginae coelorum, nominatio patris Regis angelorum, defensio Messiae promissi in Lege Iudaeorum, educatio Salvatoris omnium." Part III, chap. 18. Cf. also Part III, chap. 17; Part I, chaps. 4, 5, 11.

²³ Suarez, *In Summam theologicam*, III, q. 29, disp. viii, sec. 1.

²⁴ Sinibaldi, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff. for a clear and excellent exposition of his line of reasoning relative to the order of the hypostatic union.

panegyric on this great saint when he tells us: "Among vocations I have noticed two in the Scriptures that seem direct opposites, the apostles' and Joseph's. Jesus is revealed to the apostles to be announced throughout the universe; He is revealed to Joseph to be passed over in silence and to be kept hidden. The apostles act as light, to show Jesus Christ to the world. Joseph serves as a veil to cover Him; and under this mysterious veil are hidden for us Mary's virginity and the Savior's greatness. . . . He who glorifies the apostles with the honor of preaching glorifies Joseph with the humility of silence." Before the manifestation of the first Christmas should come, it had to be prepared for by thirty years of hidden life.

For each of us perfection consists in doing what God wills in the life to which He has called us. Joseph's entirely exceptional vocation seems, in its silence and obscurity, to surpass the calling of the greatest apostles, touching so closely the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation. After Mary, Joseph appears nearer than anyone else to the Author of grace; and if he was, then he received in the silence of Bethlehem, during the sojourn in Egypt, and in Nazareth's little home, more graces than any other saint will ever receive.

His special mission in regard to Mary consisted chiefly in contracting with the Mother of God a real and absolutely holy marriage. According to the account given in St. Matthew's Gospel,²⁵ an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his sleep and told him: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Mary was really his wife by

²⁵ Matt. 1: 20.

a true²⁶ and entirely heavenly marriage, which was to have a fruitfulness wholly divine.²⁷ The initial fullness of grace given to the Virgin in view of her divine motherhood in a sense evoked the mystery of the Incarnation.²⁸ As Bossuet says: "The virginity of Mary drew Jesus down from heaven. . . . Since her purity made her fruitful, I have no fear to assert that Joseph had his part in this great miracle; for if angelic purity is Mary's treasure, this treasure lay in the keeping of the just Joseph."²⁹

Joseph, in the simple framework of a village carpenter's life, had the privilege of sharing in a stainless and reverent union with the most perfect creature that God has ever made. He has drawn nearer the Mother of God than any other saint, more closely allied than anyone else to the Mother of all men, Joseph himself included. Under all her titles as co-redemptrix, universal mediatrix and distributor of all grace, Joseph loved Mary with the purest and most devoted love, a love that can rightly be called theological, for he loved the Virgin in God and for God, because of all the glory that she gave to God. The beauty of the whole universe bears no comparison to the sublime union of these two souls, a union created by the Most High, giving delight to the angels and joy to God Himself.

As to Joseph's exceptional mission in regard to our Lord, we know that in all truth the Word of God made flesh was confided to him rather than to any other of the just men of all generations. The holy old Simeon took the child Jesus into his arms for a few moments and saw in Him the salva-

²⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 29, a. 2.

²⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, in IV Sent., dist. 30, q. 2, ad 4um.

²⁸ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 2, a. 11, ad 3um.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, first panegyric on St. Joseph, 1st point.

tion of the people, "*lumen ad revelationem gentium*," but Joseph looked after Him night and day during His whole infancy, often holding in his arms the Child in whom he beheld his Creator and Savior. From Him he received grace upon grace during the long years when he lived with Him in closest daily intimacy, watching Him grow, contributing to His human education, receiving His obedience.³⁰ He is commonly called the "foster father of the Savior," but he was in a sense more than that for, as St. Thomas points out,³¹ by marriage a man becomes a child's "foster father" or "adopted father" only accidentally; while there was nothing at all accidental in Joseph being given charge of Jesus. He had been created and put into the world for just that end. It was his predestination, and in view of his wholly divine mission Providence had accorded to him all the graces that he had received from his infancy, graces of deep piety, of virginity, of prudence, and of perfect fidelity. In the eternal designs of God, Joseph's union with Mary existed simply for the Savior's protection and education, and Joseph received from God a father's heart to care for the Child Jesus. This was his principal mission; in view of it he received sanctity proportionate, in a sense, to his rank, to the mystery of the Incarnation, which dominates, in its infinite reaches, the whole order of grace.³² Sinibaldi's recent work, *La Grandezza di San Giuseppe*,³³ brings out St. Joseph's eternal predestination as the Blessed Virgin Mary's spouse, explaining with St. Thomas the threefold fitness of such a predestination. The Angelic

³⁰ Luke 2: 51: "He was subject to them."

³¹ Cf. IV Sent., *loc. cit.*

³² It can be asserted that Joseph was confirmed in grace from the time of his marriage to the Blessed Virgin. Cf. *Dict. theol.*, article cited above in note 16.

³³ Sinibaldi, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-35.

Doctor established the same point himself; asking whether it was fitting that Christ should be born of a virgin who had contracted a real marriage, he gave as his answer that it was fitting for the sake of Christ Himself, His Mother, and us.³⁴

It was highly fitting for our Lord Himself because, until the time should come for the mystery of His birth to be manifested, He would not then be considered an illegitimate son and would have protection during His childhood. For the Blessed Virgin it was no less fitting because it kept her from being judged a guilty adulteress and stoned as such by the Jews, as St. Jerome observed; it also served to protect her in the difficulties and persecution that began with the Savior's birth. It was, St. Thomas adds, very expedient for us, too, because we thus learn through testimony above suspicion, Joseph's, about Christ's virginal conception; in the human order of things, his testimony also lends support to Mary's. Lastly, it was supremely fitting that we should find in Mary at once the perfect model of virgins, of wives, and of Christian mothers.

Herein lies the explanation of why, according to some authors, the eternal decree of the Incarnation, so far as it must be realized *hic et nunc*, in such and such determined circumstances, included not only Jesus and Mary but Joseph as well. From all eternity indeed it was decided that the Word of God made flesh should be born miraculously of Mary ever virgin united to the just Joseph in bonds of true marriage. St. Luke thus expresses the carrying out of this providential decree: "And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin

³⁴ IIIa, q. 29, a. 1.

espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."³⁵

St. Bernard called St. Joseph "*Magni concilii coadjutorem fidelissimum.*"³⁶ Sinibaldi, following Suarez and others, asserts for the reasons given above that St. Joseph's ministry adjoins in a sense the order of the hypostatic union,³⁷ not that St. Joseph intrinsically cooperated with the Holy Ghost as a physical instrument in realizing the mystery of the Incarnation; his role is a much lesser one than Mary's as the Mother of God; but he was predestined to be, in the order of moral causes, the guardian of Mary's virginity and honor and the protector of the Child Jesus. We must avoid in this matter certain exaggerations which falsify the expression of a great mystery.³⁸ The worship due to Joseph does not specifically exceed the *dulia* paid to the other saints, but everything leads us to think that he, more than any other saint, deserves to receive the worship of *dulia*.³⁹ In her prayers the Church mentions him immediately after Mary and before the apostles, for example in the prayer *A cunctis*. Although St. Joseph receives no mention in the canon of the Mass, today he has a special preface, and the month of March is dedicated to him.

³⁵ Luke 1: 27.

³⁶ *Homilia 2 super Missus est, prope finem.*

³⁷ Cf. Sinibaldi, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff.

³⁸ All physical cooperation even of an instrumental kind is excluded on St. Joseph's part. The words of the *Credo*, "*conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto*," have always been understood "*de solo Spiritu Sancto*." Cf. St. Thomas, *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chap. 45.

A great deal of testimony from the Fathers could be quoted on the subject, especially from St. Ephrem of Syria, cited by Father Bover, S.J., in the *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, April, 1928. St. Augustine can also be consulted, *P.L.*, XXXVIII, 351, and in modern times St. Francis de Sales, *Œuvres*, Vol. VI, ed. Dom Mackey (Annecy, 1895), pp. 354 ff.

³⁹ Sinibaldi, *op. cit.*, p. 242; Lepicier, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

In a discourse that was given in the Consistory Chamber on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1928, His Holiness Pope Pius XI compared St. Joseph's vocation with St. John the Baptist's and St. Peter's. There is significance, His Holiness said, in the fact that God raises up certain magnificent and lustrous figures so near to one another as to be almost contemporaries:

St. John the Baptist, who came out of the desert with a voice now thundering like a roaring lion and now speaking with the accents of the friend of the bridegroom rejoicing at the bridegroom's glory, and at the last offering up before the world the glory of his own martyrdom; Peter, who heard the divine Master speak to him divine words that bore witness about him before all men of all ages: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church." "Going therefore, teach ye all nations." His was a magnificent and divinely radiant mission. Between these two, St. Joseph's appears, in recollection and in silence, almost unperceived and unknown, coming to light only centuries later when its silence was to be broken by a resounding hymn of glory. There where the mystery lies deepest, the surrounding night grows darkest, the silence grows greatest, the highest mission is to be found, accompanied and re-echoed by a happy necessity in a brilliant retinue of virtues and merits. It is a unique and very high mission to guard the Son of God, the King of the world, to watch over the virginity and sanctity of Mary, to have a hidden place and share in this great mystery, shielded from the eyes of the centuries while cooperating in the Incarnation and Redemption. All Joseph's sanctity lies precisely in the completely faithful accomplishment of this great and humble mission, so high and so hidden, so splendid and so surrounded with shadows.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This discourse was given on the occasion of the decree of the heroic character of the virtues of Venerable Jeanne-Elisabeth Bichier des Ages.

*St. Joseph's supernatural virtues
and gifts*

St. Joseph possessed the virtues of the hidden life in a degree corresponding to his sanctifying grace: ⁴¹ he had profound humility, penetrating and undismayed faith, immovable hope, and above all, immense charity growing without pause because of his contact with Jesus. He was characterized too by the delicate bounty of a poor man made rich in his poverty by God's greatest gifts, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, bestowed in a degree proportionate to his charity. The litany says of him: "Joseph most just, most chaste, most prudent, most strong, most obedient, most faithful, mirror of patience, lover of poverty, model of workers, glory of home life."

At times his living faith was anguished: in its obscurity he had a foreboding of something too great for him, especially when he remained in ignorance of the secret of the virginal conception, which Mary's humility kept hidden from him.⁴² Then God's message transmitted by an angel brought him light. Joseph could have hesitated to believe a thing so extraordinary, but he believed it firmly in the simplicity of his heart, and this signal grace, far from making him proud, confirmed him for all time in humility. Why, he asked himself, has the Most High given this infinite treasure to me, Joseph, to be guarded? He saw with truth that he could never merit such a gift and understood the complete gratuitousness

⁴¹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 66, a. 2.

⁴² St. Thomas says on the subject, in *IV Sent.*, dist. 30, q. 2, a. 2, ad 5: "*Joseph noluit Mariam dimittere quasi aliam ducturus vel propter aliquam suspicionem, sed quia timebat tantae sanctitati cohabitare propter reverentiam, unde dictum est ei: Noli timere, Matt. 1: 20.*"

of the divine predilection for him, that the sovereignly free divine good pleasure has no other reason for being than itself. At the same time, the carpenter saw with new clarity the meaning of the prophecies, and his faith grew greater and greater.

However, the darkness delayed little in returning, for Joseph was to make his way through sunlight and shadow. Already poor before becoming the object of the divine predilection, before receiving the secret of God, he became poorer still, as Bossuet remarks, when Jesus came into the world. The Savior found no room even in Bethlehem's meanest inn and had to go out and seek shelter in a stable. With so tender a heart, Joseph must have suffered at having nothing to give Mary and her Son. When Jesus enters a soul, the saints tell us, He comes bringing His cross and detaches the soul from everything else that He may unite it to Himself. Joseph and Mary understood this from the first, and the prophecy of the aged Simeon served to confirm their foreboding.

Persecution began almost at once, Herod seeking to have the Messiah killed. Warned by an angel, the head of the holy family had to escape to Egypt with Mary and the Child Jesus. He set out for a distant country where no one knew him, with his work as his only resource; but he undertook the journey with strong faith in God's word as told him by the angel. His mission demanded that he hide our Lord, shielding Him from His persecutors, and returning to Nazareth only when the danger had been dispelled. Joseph acted as the minister and protector of Christ's hidden life, just as the apostles served as the ministers of His public life.

In the hidden life led by St. Joseph an ever brighter and sweeter light radiated from the holy soul of the Word made

flesh and illumined the dark and afflictive night of faith in which he walked. After the return from Egypt, during the years when the holy family lived at Nazareth, recollection and silence reigned in the carpenter's little home, a true sanctuary, more sacred than the holy of holies in the temple at Jerusalem. The three there maintained a silence full of sweetness, for it spoke of loving contemplation of God's infinite mystery come down to earth but still unknown to men. From time to time words served to convey the depths of their souls to one another, but in an atmosphere of such innocence and love they had little need for speech; a look sufficed for mind to communicate with mind and heart to speak to heart.

After the contemplation of the Blessed Virgin there existed none simpler or more loving than the humble carpenter's when he looked upon Jesus. By grace he had received the sentiments of a most devoted and tender father and protector for Jesus and was loved by Him as a child and growing boy with a tenderness, gratitude, and strength only to be found in the heart of God. One look at Jesus served to bring back to Joseph the mystery of Bethlehem, the exile in Egypt, the great mystery of the salvation of the world. The incessant action of the Word of God made flesh upon Joseph was a creative activity, first giving life and then conserving it: "*amor Dei infundens et creans bonitatem in rebus*";⁴³ it was a supernatural action, rich with ever new graces. No searching of ours will disclose to us greatness that can surpass Joseph's, found in such perfect simplicity.

In the Old Testament we find a similar figure in the prophet Joseph, sold by his brothers and destined to become

⁴³ St. Thomas, Ia, q. 20, a. 2.

a symbol of Christ. He also knew the highest contemplation in the simplest form, divine contemplation wholly penetrated with the pure love of charity. In the new dispensation Joseph carried in his heart the world's greatest secret, the redemptive Incarnation, for the hour had not yet come to reveal it. The Jews would not have understood, they would not have believed; many of them looked for a temporal Messiah clothed in glory, not a Messiah made poor and suffering for us. Joseph's presence veiled the mystery: Jesus was called the carpenter's son. A common artisan housed the Word made flesh in his home, he possessed the Desired of the nations announced by the prophets and said no word of it to anyone, witnessing the mystery and tasting its delights in secret and in silence.

Joseph's contemplation brought him sweetness, but it also demanded abnegation great enough to include bitter sacrifice whenever he recalled Simeon's words: "Behold this Child is set . . . for a sign which shall be contradicted," and those spoken to Mary, "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." Joseph saw the acceptance of the mystery of Redemption through suffering as the sorrowful consummation of the mystery of the Incarnation and he had need of all his great love's generosity to offer God, as a supreme sacrifice, the Child Jesus and His Blessed Mother, far dearer to him than life itself. To offer the Eucharistic sacrifice was not given to him, but he often offered the Child Jesus to His Father for us. As Abbé Sauv  says, without seeing God's will St. Joseph accepted from it with equal simplicity the deepest joys and the bitterest sorrows.

We can hardly conceive what wonderful progress St. Joseph made in faith, in contemplation, and in love. The

more hidden was his life on earth, the more glorified is he now in heaven. He whom the Word of God obeyed on earth still holds a marvelous power of intercession over the heart of Jesus in heaven. As he once watched over Nazareth's home, he now watches over Christian families, religious communities, and virgins consecrated to God, acting as their guide, so St. Teresa tells us, in the ways of prayer. He is also, as his litany reminds us, the solace of the wretched, the hope of the sick, the patron of the dying, the terror of demons, and the protector of Holy Church, the great family of our Lord. Let us ask him to reveal to us the worth of the hidden life, the splendor of Christ's mysteries, and God's infinite goodness as he himself saw it in the redemptive Incarnation.

Let us ask of him the grace of contemplation and of union that we may come to a fuller understanding of the Psalmist's beautiful words which the Church puts daily on our lips in the *Pretiosa*: "Look upon thy servants and upon their works: and direct their children. And let the brightness of the Lord our God be upon us: and direct thou the works of our hands over us; yea, the works of our hands do thou direct."⁴⁴ Of St. Joseph we can say that such was his grace that the brightness of the Lord our God dwelt and continues to dwell in him, and so abundant was the fruit of this grace in him that he would share it with all who have caught a glimpse of the value of prayer and truly aspire to a life hidden with Christ in God.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ps. 89: 16 f.

⁴⁵ Col. 3: 3.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SOUL OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

To complete the doctrine already set forth on union with God and the purifications that dispose us for such union, we discuss next what constitutes the very soul, as it were, of the Sacrifice of the Mass and in what manner we should unite ourselves to the sacrifice through personal oblation. Recent controversies about the essence of the sacrifice of the altar have brought into bolder and bolder relief certain fundamental points that are enlightening.¹

Sacrifice in general is the oblation of a sensible thing made by a priest to God through some destruction or immolation²

¹ Cf. Lepin, *L'Idée du sacrifice de la Messe d'après les théologiens depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926).

² With the early theologians we say not a real destruction but some destruction, either real or analogous as a sign of real destruction. Immolation is used not univocally (in the same sense) but analogously (in two senses having a proportionate likeness to one another) of the bloody immolation of the cross and the unbloody immolation of the Mass.

In fact, in the true but unbloody sacrifice of the holy Mass, a sacramental or mystical immolation suffices. Besides, even in bloody sacrifice, a real immolation is required not because of its reality but because of its exterior signification of our interior oblation, adoration, and contrition. Exterior immolation is required as a reality, *ut res*, only for the eating of animals; even in bloody sacrifices it is required *ut signum externum*, as the external sign of interior sentiments, without which it would lack sense and meaning. Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 2, ad 2um: "The offering of a sacrifice is measured not by the value of the animal killed, but by its signification, for it is done in honor of the sovereign Ruler of the whole universe. Wherefore, as Augustine says (*De civ. Dei, loc. cit.*), *the demons rejoice, not in the strench of corpses, but in receiving divine honors.*" Billuart himself, who requires real destruction as part of his definition for sacrifice in general, is after-

consecrating it to God and consuming it in His honor in recognition of His sovereign dominion over all things and of our perfect submission to Him.³ Throughout the ages different peoples have offered to God incense, the fruits of the earth, bread and wine, and the best of their animals. The word "holocaust" applies to the most perfect sacrifice of all, in which the whole victim is consumed in God's honor as a sensible expression of perfect adoration, of thanksgiving for benefits received, of supplication for graces to be obtained, and of complete and whole-souled contrition for sins committed, whether openly or in secret, acknowledging their gravity and imploring God's pardon.

We see, then, that the soul of the Holy Sacrifice consists in the priest's interior oblation, in which all unite with him. Without it we have only the external part of the act, and external immolation alone loses all significance, for it comprises only the body of the sacrifice, and when the body lacks a soul it is nothing but a corpse, as Cain's offering serves to show us. The outward immolation of an animal as the reality, *ut res*, of the sacrifice is required even in bloody sacrifice only as an outward sign of an inner oblation of adoration and contrition. Without these interior dispositions the external offering has no meaning and no value, a fact of prime importance. In seeking to discover the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass we think too little about this and should find it helpful to recall that it stands at absolutely the opposite pole

ward satisfied, when treating of the Mass, with a mystical immolation. "Mystical" is not the opposite of "spiritually real" (for the mystical body is even more real than our physical body), but it is the opposite of "corporeally real," in the present instance, to bloody immolation, that is, the physical separation of the Savior's body and blood.

³ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 1, 2, 3.

from Cain's sacrifice. Sometimes we involve ourselves in insoluble difficulties because we forget the most elementary truths.

Furthermore, a simple interior offering cannot suffice for a sacrifice properly so called, for sacrifice includes not only an interior but also an exterior and even a public act of religion. It must then have a body, as it were, a material part expressing the offering just as language provides a material mode of expression for acts of thought and will.

The sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were only a figure of the great sacrifice to be offered by our Lord in the future. The figure had value in proportion as the interior offering was inspired by faith and love of God. Sometimes the interior offering was made with absolutely heroic faith and love. When Abraham made ready to immolate his son Isaac, the child of promise, and the boy himself, a figure of Christ, allowed himself to be bound for the sacrifice, both were inspired by the same faith, obedience, and piety.

*The everlasting oblation of our Lord,
the eternal Priest*

From all eternity the Word of God willed to become incarnate, to offer Himself as a victim for our salvation: "*Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis.*" As it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For it is impossible that with the blood of oxen and goats sin should be taken away. Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith: Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me: holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold I come . . . that I should do Thy will, O God."⁴

⁴ Heb. 10: 4-7.

What other reparation indeed could suffice? By mortal sin men willfully turn away from God and practically deny Him His infinite dignity as their sovereign good and last end, deliberately preferring some miserable finite good, some object of the concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes, or of pride. The gravity of an offense is measured by the dignity of the person offended and, since God's dignity is boundless, an offense against Him exceeds all measure. An act of love, of acknowledgment of God's sovereign goodness, and of hatred for sin with an infinite value is necessary to make reparation for an offense of infinite magnitude. Now no human or angelic creature, even with an absolutely exceptional degree of grace and of charity like Mary's, could make such an act of love and recognition of God's sovereign dominion; any created will, any created charity, and the acts proceeding from them likewise, are always limited.

That the world might offer to God an act of love of infinite value, it was necessary that the Word become incarnate and take a body and soul like ours. Certainly the act of love that sprang up and still arises from His human will, vivified by the fullness of created charity, draws an infinite value from His divine personality. The Word made flesh, through His human will offers up an act of reparative charity which pleases God more than all the crimes of the whole world together can displease Him.⁵

⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2um. "The satisfaction of a mere man cannot be sufficient for sin; . . . a sin committed against God has a kind of infinity from the infinity of the divine majesty, because the greater the person we offend, the more grievous the offense. Hence for condign satisfaction it was necessary that the act of the one satisfying should have an infinite efficiency, as being of God and man."

St. Thomas also says, IIa, q. 48, a. 2: "He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves equally, or even more than he detested the offense. But by suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race. First of all, because of the exceeding charity from which He suffered; secondly, on

*Christ's continual offering
during His life on earth*

St. Paul tells us that from the first moment of our Lord's entrance into the world He began His offering of Himself, and it continued without interruption until it was completed by the *consummatum est*. In the crib of Bethlehem, at the presentation in the temple when He enlightened the aged Simeon, later when He astonished the doctors by His wisdom, unceasingly during His hidden life at Nazareth, and all throughout His public life, His heart kept making its one offering. This act constituted the soul of His apostolate and served as the leitmotiv of His preaching: "I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled? And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?"⁶ "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself."⁷ "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?"⁸

account of the dignity of His life which He laid down in atonement, for it was the life of one who was God and man; thirdly, on account of the extent of the Passion, and the greatness of the grief endured." The value of Christ's sufferings sprang from the charity with which the Word made flesh offered them.

The doctrine so clearly formulated by St. Thomas and later becoming common was then confirmed by the encyclical of His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*: "*At nulla creata vis hominum sceleribus expiandis erat satis, nisi humanam naturam Dei Filius reparandam assumpsisset.*" The Council of Cologne in 1860 stated, and its statement was thereafter approved by the Holy See, that only the God-man could make satisfaction in strict justice. Some theologians, with Scotus and Durandus of Saint-Pourçain, have admitted that a simple creature, adorned with eminent grace, could have, strictly speaking, offered adequate satisfaction for man's sin. As Father Hugon says in his article, "La doctrine spirituelle de la dernière encyclique," *La vie spirituelle*, July-August, 1928, hereafter we have a papal document ratifying the traditional teaching preserved by St. Thomas and there is no longer any room for discussion.

⁶ Luke 12: 49 f.

⁷ John 12: 32.

⁸ Matt. 20: 22.

As long as it remained interior only, Christ's act could not suffice to constitute a sacrifice properly so called but it became so at the Last Supper, when He immolated Himself sacramentally under the appearance of bread and wine, thus giving reality to what had been prefigured by the oblation of Melchisedech, a priest of the true God.⁹ The sacrifice of the Last Supper was the same in substance as the sacrifice of the cross soon to be accomplished: "Take ye and eat. This is My body. . . . Drink ye all of this. For this is My blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins."¹⁰

Our Lord's inner oblation obviously continued and even attained its apogee during the passion and crucifixion, accompanying the most perfect outward sacrifice, the passive immolation of the one really worthy victim by the one great High Priest, our Lord. Certainly, Christ did not procure His own death; decide, the greatest of crimes, in no way belongs to the sacrifice of the cross; but our Lord could have miraculously protected His body from suffering, as later He protected some of the martyrs; but He gave Himself up fully to pain, seeking no palliative in the beatific vision still preserved at the peak of His intellect, offering Himself as He had foretold, "I lay down My life. . . . No man taketh it away from Me: but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father."¹¹

Even abstracting from the Last Supper, the passion and the cross had, as St. Thomas shows,¹² everything required for

⁹ Gen. 14: 19.

¹⁰ Matt. 26: 27; I Cor. 11: 24.

¹¹ John 10: 18. Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 48, a. 3, ad 3um.

¹² IIIa, q. 48, a. 3.

the greatest sacrifice, containing eminently and formally the ritual character of all the sacrifices prefiguring it. It lacked nothing: the passive immolation of the only victim of infinite worth and the active oblation of infinite value. When Jesus prayed at Nazareth and preached on the mountain, then as always He was making an interior oblation of Himself to the Father; on the cross His offering became exteriorized, for His bruised body was immolated, His blood poured out, and His oblation expressed in those last words that were the consecration of the sacrifice of the cross: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."¹³ "It is consummated."¹⁴ When Christ had spoken, then was the most perfect holocaust conceivable immolated.

*Christ's unending intercession
for us*

"... always living to make intercession for us."

Heb. 7:25

"Idem nunc offerens ministerio sacerdotum."

Council of Trent

Christ's bloody immolation is over and done, but His interior offering continues forever. It is no longer meritorious, for Christ no longer makes His way toward eternity, but it remains forever a prayer of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and supplication, and continues to apply to succeeding generations the merits of Calvary. Jesus Christ is, as St. Paul

¹³ Luke 23: 46; Ps. 30: 6.

¹⁴ John 19: 30.

says, "always living to make intercession for us."¹⁵ It is of faith that Christ always possesses the beatific vision, seeing more fully than all the angels and saints the divine essence and, in the divine essence, all that touches the kingdom of God. He never ceases loving His Father and souls in Him, never fails to support us by His love, never stops adoring and giving thanks. In Him, with Him, and by Him the elect shall forever sing the hymn of praise, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*.

Christ's prayer of supplication shall cease, of course, at the end of the world, but until then Christ prays for us, that His merits and His reparation may be applied to us.¹⁶ The infinite treasure of His infinitely rich prayer is expressed chiefly in the Sacrifice of the Mass, by which our Lord as the principal priest offers and is offered, priest and victim being one and the same, as once upon the cross and now through His ministers, only the manner of oblation differing, being bloody on Calvary and unbloody on the altar.¹⁷

On the altar we have only a sacramental immolation reminding us of the bloody immolation of the cross and applying its fruits to us.¹⁸ Although it is but sacramental, it suffices to constitute a true sacrifice, unbloody indeed but more real than any of the Old Testament sacrifices. Under the Old Law in fact the bloody immolation of bulls and goats was required merely as an outward sign, *non ut res sed ut signum*,¹⁹ of adoration and of contrition of heart. Although simply sacramental, our Lord's immolation at Holy Mass through the separate consecration of the bread and wine is as an out-

¹⁵ Heb. 7: 25.

¹⁶ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 83, a. 11.

¹⁷ Sess. XXII, chap. 2.

¹⁸ St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 83, a. 1.

¹⁹ IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 2, ad 2um.

ward sign of adoration and reparation and incomparably more expressive than the bloody immolation of all the victims of the Old Law. Jesus becomes present on the altar as if in the state of death, as if His body and blood were separated. This sacramental immolation, by applying Christ's merits to us, signifies that He is always ready to bear the greatest sufferings and to die for each of us, if need be, that we may be saved.

As two different modes of external oblation, the cross and the Mass serve to illuminate each other in a wonderful way. What stood out plainly and clearly to all witnesses at the cross was the bloody immolation of an innocent victim; what remained so hidden and mysterious that all the apostles except John failed to grasp it, in spite of their preparation by the Old Testament prophecies, Christ's own words, and the Last Supper, was the oblation of the eternal priest, who became by His annihilation in this hour of darkness the victor over sin and Satan.

On the contrary, in the Mass we see plainly the evident enactment of an outward oblation and easily grasp the intention of offering a sacrifice; what remains mysterious for us is the immolation called mystical, the sign of Christ's continual oblation by which He offers up to God Himself and all souls united to Him, particularly those who suffer supernaturally, something of what He endured.

What stands out sharply on the cross lies hidden in the Mass, and what shows up boldly in the Mass remains mysteriously hidden on the cross: these two different modes of offering serve to lay bare the heart of one and the same sacrifice.

*Identity of substance in Christ's sacrifice
on the cross and in the Mass*

The Mass perpetuates in substance the sacrifice of the cross and also commemorates it by a new mode of oblation applying its fruits to us. It is not merely another sacrifice like Calvary's, having a specific similarity to it, as this year's roses have to last year's; it is individually the same sacrifice *quoad substantiam*, that is, as to its substance.²⁰ Although the bloody manner of oblation ceased with the Savior's death and the unbloody outward oblation begins anew with each Mass, the same victim is always offered and the same high priest always makes the offering by the same interior act of oblation which will last forever, "*idem nunc offerens ministerio sacerdotum.*" When the priest at the altar pronounces the words of consecration in our Lord's name, Jesus here and now wills that they be pronounced and He Himself communicates to them as His instruments their transubstantive power, desiring to be offered up in this manner in order that the merits of His passion and death may be applied to all generations of men upon the earth and to the souls in purgatory.

If it should happen that the consecrating minister becomes distracted at the very moment of consecration, Jesus is not distracted. Even if the minister should be a bad priest, provided that he still wills to perform the act instituted by our Lord according to the mind of the Church, the Mass that he

²⁰ This distinction is current among theologians. Cf. for example, Billuart, *Cursus theol.*, "De sacrificio missae," i, answer to the 1st objection: "That in the Church there is one sacrifice as to its substance, I concede; as to its manner, I deny. The sacrifice of the Mass is the same in substance as the sacrifice of the cross, . . . it differs in manner, the sacrifice of the cross was bloody, the sacrifice of the altar is unbloody."

offers always has an infinite value and can profit thousands of souls as easily as one, just as the sun shines with ready bounty on all who walk in its light.

The question will arise: How can the same sacrifice be substantially perpetuated without the bloody immolation also being continued or at least renewed? The bloody immolation is a passing external act and has no need to be re-enacted for a profound reason well within the grasp of all. We can consider first the active immolation which it contains, the putting to death, and then secondly the passive immolation, the real and violent separation of the Savior's body and blood, a separation resulting from the active immolation and incapable of being produced without it.

Now the active immolation of the Word of God made flesh in the sense of His being put to death stands out as the greatest crime that the earth has ever known and certainly should not be renewed. St. Thomas declares that it was not a sacrifice but an evil deed, "*non fuit sacrificium . . . sed maleficium.*"²¹ It formed no part of the sacrifice of the cross but was on the contrary a wicked act, a sacrilege, deicide, certainly not to be renewed on the altar either really or virtually. This act could be attributed to Christ's minister and to Christ Himself only on condition that our Lord would either really or virtually encompass His own death, something which plainly did not take place on the cross.

As to the bloody passive immolation, that is, the real and violent separation of the Savior's body and blood, it came about only through the active immolation or killing and takes place no more since the resurrection. Moreover, not every

²¹ IIIa, q. 48, a. 3, ad 3um.

real sacrifice, but only bloody sacrifice, requires the victim's actual destruction.

This truth answers the Protestant objection that every true sacrifice demands as one of its essentials the real destruction of the victim offered; that in the Mass no such real destruction takes place, Christ being now impassible; that the Mass cannot therefore be a true sacrifice and to claim that it is would be to declare the sacrifice of the cross as lacking in sufficiency. To the difficulty proposed, the Council of Trent replies, as we have already noted, that the Mass is not a bloody sacrifice but a true sacrifice, perpetuating in an unbloody manner the substance of the sacrifice of the cross in order that we may commemorate it and receive its fruits. The body of Christ offered on the altar is the same body that really suffered on the cross for love of us.

It may be insisted that active and passive bloody immolation certainly cannot be continued or renewed but that without them neither can the sacrifice of the cross be substantially perpetuated on our altars. To this we answer that what can be asserted of Christ's humanity can be held in regard to His sacrifice as well. Christ's humanity remains substantially the same, although it has become impassible and immortal instead of being passible and mortal as it was during His earthly life. Not only the Savior's soul subsists, but His body also has become immortal. Comparably, not only the soul of Christ's sacrifice, the interior oblation, endures but the offering of the victim continues to be made, although in an unbloody manner. Not merely the soul of the sacrifice but the substance of the sacrifice is perpetuated. Nothing demands that the Savior's humanity be passible rather than

impassible or the very contrary, although it must be one or the other. In like manner, Christ's sacrifice can exist in substance without being restricted to one or other of the two exterior modes of oblation and of immolation, for every true sacrifice properly so called comprises an act of religion, interior as well as exterior and public, and necessitating some kind of immolation, at least sacramental, of the victim offered. No immolation existed in the presentation of Jesus in the temple;²² nor does it exist outside the Mass in a host reserved in the ciborium;²³ nor will it exist when the last Mass has been said. After the end of the world no sacrifice properly so called will be found, St. Thomas says,²⁴ but the eternal adoration and thanksgiving of Christ and the elect will endure.

Beyond the laws of space and time

To discuss this truth in relation to space and time should serve to enlighten us and lead us more deeply into the possession of this mystery.²⁵ St. Thomas, in quoting as St. Ambrose's a text from St. John Chrysostom, shows how this could be the same sacrifice in substance: everywhere the same body is offered, not being multiplied but remaining one; everywhere too, the same sacrifice is rendered.²⁶ The same body of Christ that hung on the cross, now lives in heaven

²² The presentation of Jesus in the Temple and His oblation by Himself and by Mary was not an externally manifested oblation like the offertory of the Mass. There had not yet been any real or any sacramental oblation.

²³ In the consecrated hosts preserved upon our altars, Jesus nevertheless always continues His interior offering of Himself; but this does not suffice to constitute a sacrifice properly so called: the soul of the sacrifice is there but it lacks its external expression.

²⁴ IIIa, q. 22, a. 5.

²⁵ Cf. St. Thomas in *IV Sent.*, d. 12, *Expositio textus*; *IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1.

²⁶ IIIa, q. 83, a. 1, ad 1um.

as its natural dwelling place and remains on earth in every consecrated host. It is not localized in one place, *non sicut in loco*,²⁷ but exists wherever it is substantially, and just as substantially as the bread which it replaced through transubstantiation. Now a substance exists entirely in the whole and entirely in each part of the whole, the whole substance of bread being in each part of the host before consecration and the whole substance of Christ's body being in each part of the host after consecration. Christ's body, by reason of its real, substantial, and sacramental presence, transcends the laws of space, as does every substance.

The body of Christ also transcends the laws of time, for it is the same body that lay in Bethlehem's crib, that hung on Calvary's cross, that was tabernacled in the infant Church and receives our adoration today, as young as it was two thousand years ago. The changes of time cannot touch it; it remains the same *hostia perpetua*, offered today and tomorrow and until the end of the world. And as our Lord's body is found in each consecrated host on every altar in the world *non sicut in loco*, not subject to the laws of space, so is it also *non sicut in tempore*, not subject to the laws of time.

If the body of Jesus once crucified for us presently surmounts the laws of time in the sense here given, what shall we say of His sacred soul, of His interior act of oblation, measured like the beatific vision, like love, adoration, and thanksgiving, neither by the continuous time of our sun, nor by the discrete time of the angels marked off only by their thoughts, but by immovable eternity, by the moment that never passes, the *nunc stans et non fluens*? Our Lord's inte-

²⁷ IIIa, q. 76, a. 5.

rior oblation needs no renewal but continues without interruption, just as God conserves beings in existence not by any renewed operation but simply by a continuation of the act of creation.

Recent controversies have attracted more and more attention to the interior oblation formally present in the soul of our Savior, the principal priest of the Mass. Some authors give it too little notice; others consider it rather too exclusively. By itself, without the external sign of sacramental immolation, it does not suffice to constitute a sacrifice properly so called;²⁸ but it forms its soul, and we cannot emphasize too strongly the Council of Trent's words, "*idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio.*"²⁹

We find in these considerations an explanation of how the substance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross perpetuated on our altars surmounts time, although the external mode of oblation takes place in time, and the bloody manner of Calvary's oblation belongs to the past and the unbloody manner of the Mass is re-enacted afresh each time the Holy Sacrifice is of-

²⁸ The presence of Jesus in the consecrated hosts reserved in the tabernacle and His unbroken offering of Himself do not however constitute a sacrifice properly so called. Sacrifice is offered when Mass is celebrated.

²⁹ This doctrine, expressed in the very terms of the Council of Trent, is found in the texts of the Fathers recently gathered together by Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe*; it was commonly held by theologians of the Middle Ages and is found especially in St. Thomas' writings, IIIa, q. 83, a. 1; q. 78, a. 3, 4; q. 80, a. 12, ad 3um; q. 81, a. 4, ad 2um; q. 82, a. 1, ad 1um et a. 5, 6, 7, 8.

Among the great commentators of St. Thomas, Cajetan and John of St. Thomas speak no differently. Cf. Cajetan, 3 *Opusc. De erroribus contingentibus in Eucharistiae Sacramento*, cap. 9, and John of St. Thomas, *De Eucharistia*. It would be an error to try to find in the Mass a real destruction of Christ's body, an active immolation either real or virtual; the active immolation constituted a crime and formed no part of the sacrifice of the cross and plainly should not be renewed in the sacrifice of the Mass. Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 48, a. 3, ad 3um. Among Thomists, neither the very first, nor Cajetan, nor John of St. Thomas, nor Cano, nor Soto have spoken of an active virtual immolation. Billuart and Gonet were in the wrong to follow Lessius on this point.

fered. In this sense each Mass is distinct from every other.³⁰ The prophecy of Malachias has found its verification: "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down . . . in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation: for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts."³¹ Wherever the sun rises over the world Masses begin, their number so great that four elevations take place every second all day long; and so it shall be until the world comes to an end: the same sacrifice in substance shall ever be offered and the soul of that sacrifice shall always remain the same ever-living interior oblation of Christ's heart. Generation after generation can thus come to quench their thirst at the infinite and timeless source of all grace. Every Christian should, by living faith and the gifts of understanding and wisdom, grasp this mystery more and more fully, taste it with growing delight, and live it with increasing fidelity.³²

At Mass our Lord not only offers Himself but His mystical body as well, all souls in the state of grace and united to Him by charity, especially those who follow after Him by bearing their sufferings supernaturally.³³ St. Albert the Great³⁴ and St. Thomas³⁵ say that, when Christ offers Himself to His Father, He offers too all those whose nature He shares, all

³⁰ Thus, as we have said, the humanity of our Savior remains the same in substance although His body was passible and is now impassible.

³¹ Mal. 1: 11.

³² Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, chap. 2.

³³ According to tradition, the mystical body, thus offered with the sacred victim, is symbolized by the drop of water placed in the wine before it is offered to God.

³⁴ *De sacramento Eucharistiae*, dist. V, cap. 3 (XXI, 90). Here a beautiful passage about Christ's offering of us to His Father is brought to a close with the telling summary: "*Oblati a Dei Filio, et recepti a Deo Patre.*"

³⁵ IIIa, q. 74, a. 8, ad 2um: "If not water were added, the signification would be utterly excluded: but when the water is changed into wine, it is signified that the people is incorporated with Christ."

who are purified by His blood and made one body with Him.

The common preface of the Mass contains the same truth: "It is truly meet and just, right and availing for salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty and everlasting God, through Christ our Lord. Through whom the angels praise Thy majesty, the dominions worship it. . . . With whom we pray Thee join our voices also, while we say with lowly praise: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.*" This prayer, the adoration of angels and of men, Jesus offers to the Father, especially at the moment of Eucharistic consecration, the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, in which we share through Communion. When the last Mass has been said, the sacrifice of petition and reparation will be no more, but the worship of adoration and thanksgiving will continue in heaven for all eternity as the consummation of Christ's sacrifice.³⁶

How to unite ourselves to the Sacrifice of the Mass

To learn how we should unite ourselves to the Sacrifice of the Mass, let us first recall how the Virgin Mary, the universal mediatrix, the *vas insigne devotionis*, united herself to the sacrifice of her Son.

Mary's oblation

To Christ's unending oblation of Himself, Mary is united more closely than anyone else. During her whole earthly life, from the moment when she realized that she was to give birth to the Savior until He was born at Bethlehem, at His presentation when Simeon's warning words were spoken, during the flight into Egypt, in the silence of the home at

³⁶ St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 22, a. 5.

Nazareth, and later when seeing the difficulties of Jesus' ministry increase and the fury of the Pharisees grow, and finally and fully at the foot of the cross, she was ever offering her Son while He offered Himself for us and she offered herself together with Him, thus meriting for us in the broad sense, *de congruo*, what He merited for us strictly speaking, *de condigno*.

Mary had no need to expiate for herself; she was the Immaculate Conception, preserved from the original stain, redeemed in the most perfect way possible by her Son's future merits. She never committed the slightest sin; but for our sakes she was associated in the terrible sufferings and humiliations and great redemptive work of Jesus. No one else in the world, no saint, no martyr, no apostle, no stigmatic has ever been so closely linked to it as she. Indeed she has merited the titles of co-redemptrix and universal mediatrix through, with, in, and by our Lord. What wonderful insight into the Sacrifice of the Mass we can glean from the titles which the Church has proclaimed as Mary's! To her was not given the priestly character but she received the fullness of the spirit of the priesthood, the spirit of Christ the Redeemer.

Let us think about Mary's understanding of the Sacrifice of the Mass as St. John celebrated it before her. Better than anyone else she comprehended that the sacrifice of the altar perpetuated the sacrifice of the cross, commemorating its bloody immolation by a mystical immolation, full of meaning for her who could forget nothing of Calvary's drama. Better than anyone else Mary understood that our ever-living Lord is the principal priest of the Sacrifice of the Mass and that in the Mass He continues to offer Himself, interceding for us and applying to us the fruits of His merits. Mary saw

in the continuation of the interior oblation of our Savior, always living in heaven and made present on our altar, the point of conjunction between heaven's adoration and thanksgiving and the worship of the Church militant.

Mary united the immolation of her heart to the mystical immolation of the Mass, generously accepting all the trials experienced when the infant Church was tasting the first anguish of three centuries of persecution. The Virgin never ceased offering herself as she had done at the foot of the cross, the remembrance of those hours being vividly and deeply engraved in her heart; she offered herself for the extension of her Son's kingdom, for the apostolate of the Twelve, for souls tempted and sorely tried, for the strength of martyrs and their triumph over the spirit of evil.

Because Mary shared until death in our Lord's redemptive mission, she also shared in His glory on the day of the assumption, remaining always "through Him, with Him, and in Him" the universal mediatrix, interceding for us and distributing to us the graces for every moment of our lives, answering our supplication, "pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen." The grace of the present moment, the grace for now, is for us all throughout our lives, the most special grace of all; every minute for centuries thousands of Christians have been receiving it through Mary. She acts as mediatrix not only of all different kinds of graces necessary for apostles, martyrs, doctors, confessors, and virgins, but also for all particular graces accorded to us moment by moment. She is the universal mediatrix because as the Mother of God she is the one most closely united to our Savior's oblation, the act of reparative love that has saved the world.

Our personal offering

How should we unite ourselves personally to the offering of Christ the Redeemer? We must make reparation for our own sins, and we should accomplish something for the salvation of our neighbors as they make their way toward eternity in our company. To achieve this we ought to keep before our eyes daily the four ends of the sacrifice of the Mass: adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and reparation. And since at the most solemn moment of the day, the Eucharistic consecration, Christ Jesus performs for our sakes the ceaseless offering of Himself and with Him His whole mystical body, we ought to lend ourselves to His action and join in it by lifting up to God all the contradictions and sorrows of the present and the future in order that Mary Reparatrix, to whom God has promised the victory over the serpent, may present this oblation to her Son. He Himself will unite it to His own and offer it to the Father. Let us, then, speak to Mary with the beautiful prayer of Blessed Nicholas de Flue: "Take me from myself and give me to Thyself."

The host being consecrated, the priest lifts it up for those assisting at Mass to see, not only that they may adore, but also, as St. Albert the Great says, that they may "extend their hands and show their intention of now offering themselves to the Father through Him who has already offered Himself for us on the cross."³⁷ This seems to be the sense of the words of the canon preceding the Pater noster: "*Per ipsum,*

³⁷ Blessed Albert the Great, *De sacramento Eucharistiae*, dist. V, cap. 3; dist. VI, tr. II, cap. 4, no. 4. These texts and many others are quoted in Lepin's fine book, *L'Idée du sacrifice de la messe*, p. 181.

et cum ipso, et in ipso est tibi Deo Patri omnipotenti, in unitate Spiritus Sancti, omnis honor et gloria." By our Lord, with Him, and in Him, we ought to perform all our actions for God's glory, proffering Him all our joys and sorrows by uniting ourselves to the joyful and sorrowful mysteries of Christ's earthly life, the harbingers of the glorious mysteries to come. The beautiful prayer of the Rosary speaks this great message to us.

The Church teaches us that each Eucharistic Communion should increase our charity and make our hearts more and more like the Eucharistic heart of Jesus, priest and victim. Every time we receive, our Communion should be substantially more fervent than the one before, giving us a greater and greater share in our Lord's intentions and desires in instituting the Eucharist and in accomplishing the sacrifice of the cross on Calvary. No doubt St. Paul had all this in mind when he wrote to the Romans: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service."³⁸

St. Peter also spoke of the same great truth: "If so you have tasted that the Lord is sweet. Unto whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen and made honorable by God: be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."³⁹ The Fathers of the Church often recalled this teaching, telling us how we should assist at Mass, reminding us to unite ourselves to the principal priest, the sacred victim, by putting into prac-

³⁸ Rom. 12: 1.

³⁹ I Pet. 2: 5.

tice our Savior's words: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."⁴⁰

The priest particularly, as Christ's minister, should share not only in His priesthood, but also in some measure at least in His victimhood. For his apostolate he should have recourse to the same means that Jesus used, daily uniting his sufferings to those which the Master endured for us, and bringing down on those whom he would evangelize the overflowing superabundance of Christ's redemption: "*copiosa apud eum redemptio.*"

In Matins for the feast of All Saints the liturgy first recalls the merits of the apostles and martyrs and then speaks of the life of oblation and immolation proper to priests, doctors, and confessors of the faith, who offer themselves and their trials together with the sacred victim. It honors too the no less meritorious life of virgins, faithful in holy vigils, rejoicing in tribulations, bearing injuries and calumnies with humility, glad to endure all in order to become more conformed to our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul gives us the secret of his fruitful preaching: "I, Paul . . . fill up those things that are wanting of the suffering of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the church."⁴¹ Our Lord's passion lacks nothing in itself; it possesses infinite value, but we ourselves want for its reflection and application. To bring this about St. Paul uses the same means that our Lord used through, with, and in Him. In a sense, then, Christ's suffering as well as His prayer is carried on in His apostles and through them produces fruit

⁴⁰ Matt. 16: 24.

⁴¹ Col. 1: 24.

for eternal life. Jesus thus dignifies the members of His mystical body with the gift of causality, just as God gives efficiency to secondary causes in the universe. Several beautiful chapters in *The Imitation* deal with this subject and should be read and reread.⁴²

What priests should do to obtain grace for the souls whom they evangelize and to give battle to the spirit of evil, all faithful souls should also undertake in a measure proportionate to their grace and state of life, and all that they attempt should be carried out in union with the priest at the Holy Sacrifice and during the day by recalling that Masses are continually being offered throughout the world, wherever the sun rises. Devotion to the Eucharistic consecration comprises something essential in Christian life; without it we can have no real interior life. The double consecration, the essence of the Holy Sacrifice, marks the most solemn moment of every day of our lives. From its summit and source a fire of light and of energy should flow down over our lives and conform them to itself.

St. Thomas tells us:

Man's good is threefold. There is first his soul's good which is offered to God in a certain inward sacrifice by devotion, prayer, and other like interior acts: and this is the principal sacrifice. The second is his body's good, which is, so to speak, offered to God in martyrdom, and abstinence or continency. The third is the good which consists of external things; and of these we offer a sacrifice to God, directly when we offer our possessions to God immediately, and indirectly when we share them with our neighbor for God's sake. The three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience also make

⁴² Bk. IV, chap. 9; Bk. III, chap. 50.

this triple oblation by sacrificing to God external goods, the pleasure of the senses, and our will.⁴³

Every Christian, even without the vows, can make an offering of self having a meritorious value based on charity and proportionate to the intensity of his love for God and for souls. Our offering of self has, too, as a prayer of petition an intercessory value based on Christ's promise: "Ask, and you shall receive."⁴⁴ It will obtain whatever it asks within the framework of the divine intentions, that is to say, whenever it humbly and trustfully petitions for things necessary for salvation, the extension of God's kingdom, pardon for our offenses, and victory over the spirit of evil. When, in union with "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world," we offer ourselves to God, our oblation also possesses a reparative value, serving to blot out our sins and to obtain the remission of the punishment due to them.

When we make such an offering it contains something incommunicable, something incapable of belonging to anyone except ourselves; this is merit properly so called, *de condigno*. To ask for graces personally necessary or useful for ourselves, to make satisfaction for our own sins, are both actions that are ours in such a way that they cannot be given over to another. Because of the mystery of the communion of saints, however, such an offering contains something communicable, too, something that we can pass on to our neighbors on earth and in purgatory; this is merit in the broad sense, *de congruo*.⁴⁵ Praying for others, satisfying for the falls of sin-

⁴³ IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 3, ad 2um.

⁴⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 83, a. 15, 16.

⁴⁵ Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 6. Merit *de condigno* is a right in justice to a reward, whereas

ners and the punishment due to them offer examples of actions that can be handed over to the profit of others. The different members of the mystical body can in this way mutually help and heal one another, discharging one another's debts and obtaining pardon for the guilty.

To offer ourselves to God in the way suggested here entails no vow to become a victim; nor does it imply the abandonment of everything communicable in our good works to Mary in order that she may use it for our neighbor's good, as Blessed Grignon de Montfort counsels,⁴⁶ although it holds out an invitation to this abandonment. It does not oblige under pain of sin, can be made monthly, yearly, or for a longer period of time, and is fittingly renewed daily.

Whenever some major and deeply entrenched evil, such as French Masonry and its effect, must be fought, whenever evil manifests itself as truly satanic, then to appease God's justice spiritual action no less profound must come forward under the immediate direction of her whom God set up as the terror of demons, Mary. The Carthusians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Poor Clares, who lead a contemplative life, have a hidden apostolic role against the furious efforts of the spirit of evil and the great devils,⁴⁷ opposing them with a life of incessant prayer and immolation. Every apostle, even every fervent soul within the Church militant, should take some part in the contemplative life and its struggle, making a renewed offering of self daily at Holy Mass with

merit *de congruo* is founded only on charity and not on justice. A Christian mother merits graces congruously for her children, because of the charity uniting her to God.

⁴⁶ Cf. *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin; the Secret of Mary*.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Le rôle apostolique de la vie contemplative*, by Cyrien Bautreain, religious of Chartreux, tr. A. M. Buchanan (N.Y.: Benziger, 1911).

increasing devotion to the consecration, the act of the Savior's eternal priesthood, and continuing the same offering throughout the course of the day in difficulties and trials and in the more and more perfect accomplishment of the duties of our state of life. When we accept supernaturally the daily trials sent to us by Providence, we should also ask God not for crosses but for the love of the crosses which He Himself has laid upon us, that we may be purified and become instruments for the salvation of our neighbor.

If we would but give our full consent to such an acceptance and oblation, what consequences it would have! When we realize what evil a free and formal pact with the devil can achieve, can we doubt what great things could be accomplished in the order of good? Of course, to destroy is easier than to build, but with the help of grace, the extension of God's kingdom, although it may often be difficult, never becomes impossible, and the Holy Ghost is infinitely stronger than Satan. Those who would thus offer themselves should be consecrated to the Holy Ghost that they may come more and more under His guidance and be ever open to His inspirations and always docile to His influence.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost we understand that our own offering may not be worth a great deal, that in itself it amounts to a drop of water in the ocean, but then we are led to offer to God as our greatest gift the precious blood of His Son in a spirit of adoration, of thanksgiving, of petition, and of reparation, recalling Christ's words, "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you."⁴⁸ In the light of this message we understand that if our Lord could suffer anything in glory, He would suffer

⁴⁸ John 16: 23.

because of the obstacles that we place in the way of the graces that He desires to accord us. To surmount these obstacles we know that we must pray very especially in the name of Christ, that His prayer may really be carried on by us. When we have done this, we shall have tapped a treasure, the fullness of charity in our Savior's heart will pour out upon the Church, upon the Father of the faithful, upon bishops, pastors, and religious orders, that all the workers in our Lord's vineyard may labor efficaciously together and in perfect accord against the scheming spirit of evil, that Christian faith may shine forth, hope stand firm, and charity rise victorious over class hatred, uniting all men of our generation and of the generations to come as our Savior prayed that we might be united: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou has given Me; that they may be one, as We also are. . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."⁴⁹

The Christian who understands the meaning and implication of the oblation of self, makes it, and then renews it every day, will experience in some regards more difficulties than before because he enters the arena of a contest that has importance for all eternity; but he will receive ever-new graces to enlarge his heart and lead him to share in the manifestation of the only Son of God as the world's true Savior.

⁴⁹ John 17: 11, 22.

EPILOGUE

THE NARROW PATH OF PERFECTION AND THE FULL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ILLUMINATIVE AND UNITIVE WAYS

We see now the deep significance of the sketch outlined by St. John of the Cross at the beginning of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and explained later in the same work.¹ It gives a synthesis of his whole doctrine and represents, as we know, three ways which at first seem to lead to the summit of the symbolic mountain, although in reality only one reaches it, the narrow path of perfection represented between the other two.

On the right we see the road followed by the misguided. Those who follow it keep their attachment for the things of earth: rest, ease, human knowledge, what the world calls liberty, a taste for the things of sense and of time. Where this road begins we find the words written: "The more I seek, the less I find; I cannot climb the mountain because I have lost my way." As a matter of fact, the road that offers such a generous width at the start constricts and, instead of fulfilling its promise of ascent, soon turns downward. Sad to say, many set out along this way.

On the left we see the road followed by the imperfect: those who dally, detained not by the goods of the world but

¹ Bk. I, chap. 13; Bk. III, chap. 14.

by the enjoyment which they find in spiritual goods, for example, in the knowledge of divine things sought through curiosity, in spiritual consolations desired for themselves, in a security without firm foundation, in the esteem and praise of good people. Where this road begins we read the words: "Instead of climbing the narrow path I sought for good things and now I possess fewer than if I had taken the strait way, and the delay has held me back." In fact, the way of the imperfect soul reaches only halfway to the top; from the sketch we can see that it fails to attain even a low degree of the illuminative way, where all too rarely contemplation of divine things and actual union with God are found.

In the middle we see the strait path of perfection, entered by an opening far narrower than the other two but gradually widening as it climbs upward, for it leads to divine immensity. On this steep path, plunging sharply upward, is written, "Nothing, nothing, nothing": that is, the renouncement of earthly goods, rest, knowledge, freedom, the attraction of human things, and also the complacency taken by a still egoistic character in spiritual goods, learning, consolation, security, honor, or the esteem of others. A little farther on above this perfect purgative way is written: "The smaller your desires become, the greater shall you grow." And yet a little farther: "Because I no longer desire anything through self-love, all is given to me without my seeking it. Being attached to nothing, I find that I am without lack." By this way souls enter the perfect illuminative way through the passive night of the senses.²

St. John of the Cross explains at length the renouncement which leads thither in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, show-

² *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chaps. 8, 14.

ing that perfect detachment, "Nothing, nothing, nothing," leads to the All, that is, to intimacy with Christ Jesus, who contains within Himself the whole of faith.³ He says, "These counsels for the conquering of desires . . . I believe to be as profitable and efficacious as they are concise; so that one who sincerely desires to practice them will need no others, but will find them all included in these."

First, let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life. . . .

Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honour and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ; . . . if there present itself the pleasure of looking at things that help him not Godward, let him not desire the pleasure or look at these things. . . . And similarly with respect to all the senses, in so far as he can fairly avoid the pleasure in question. . . . And in this wise he will be able to mortify and void his senses of such pleasure and leaven them, as it were, in darkness. And having this care he will soon profit greatly.

For the mortifying and calming of the four natural passions, which are joy, hope, fear and grief, from the concord and pacification of which come these blessings, and others likewise, the counsels which follow are of the greatest help, and of great merit, and the source of great virtues.

Strive always to choose, not that which is easiest, but that which is most difficult; not that which is most delectable, but that which is most unpleasing; not that which gives most pleasure, but rather that which gives least; . . . not that which is loftiest and most precious, but that which is lowest and most despised. . . .⁴

³ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. 13, tr. Peers, I, 60 ff.

⁴ This is to be understood as said in Bk. III, chap. 15: "A man must not fail to think and recall that which he ought to know and do, for, provided he preserves

Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to that which is in the world, for Christ's sake. And it is meet that the soul embrace these acts with all its heart and strive to subject its will thereto. For, if it perform them with its heart, it will very quickly come to find in them great delight and consolation, and to act with order and discretion.

St. John of the Cross then encourages us to strive for contempt of self and to desire that our neighbor count us for little as well, remarking that this is salutary for the destruction of the pride of life.

If you would love all, seek satisfaction in none.

If you would have all knowledge, rest content to do without it.

If you would possess all, pursue nothing.

Whatever you possess, hold it as if you had it not;

For whenever you find that you desire something

Then do you discover that God is not yet treasure enough for you.

In these words is contained the full meaning of the words written across the middle of his sketch of the ascent of Mount Carmel, "Because I desire nothing out of self-love, all is given to me without my seeking it": all, and first of all, the solid moral virtues written by name as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, followed by the inspirations of the

no affection or attachments, this will do him no harm. For this question the lines of the Mount, which are in the thirteenth chapter of the first book, will be of profit.

"But here it must be borne in mind that this doctrine of ours does not agree, nor do we desire to agree, with the doctrine of those pestilent men, who, inspired by satanic pride and envy, have desired to remove from the eyes of the faithful the holy and necessary use of images of God and of the saints . . . ; they will ever assist it [the soul] to union with God, allowing the soul to soar upward (when God grants it that favour) from the superficial image to the living God, forgetting every creature and everything that belongs to creatures." Tr. Peers, I, 257 f.

gifts and fruits of the Holy Ghost, written to right and left of them.

As the soul then becomes more and more subject to the rule of the gifts and ought to be especially docile to interior inspirations, we read on the sketch, for the continuation of the climb, the statement that beyond this point no fixed road lies ahead; the soul must thereafter listen in silence and recollection for the voice of the interior Master and be docile to it, going forward by ways unmarked through the passive night of the soul toward the perfect unitive way.⁵

Then under the inspirations of the spirit of wisdom comes the full flowering of the three theological virtues, the names of which St. John of the Cross wrote almost at the peak of the mountain. From them proceed those highest acts which the saint expresses in these words: "Divine silence, divine wisdom, unending banquet. The glory and honor of God dwell alone on this mountain." It is still night, but the dawn of eternal life has begun to break as the saint expresses it in the beautiful chant *Aunque es de noche* ("Although It Be Night"): "I know this water which springs up and flows away. . . . Its source is hidden in Life eternal but its secret course I have learned, although it be night."⁶

This is the summit reached by the narrow road leading to life.⁷ This is the footpath which St. John of the Cross himself followed for forty-nine years through suffering and persecution to its end. Climbing it, he learned what he himself said, i.e., that suffering is the means par excellence of entering a deep and delightful knowledge of God because

⁵ Cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 1, 2.

⁶ Given in Hoornaert's translation at the end of *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, ed. 1922, II, 192.

⁷ Matt. 7: 14.

suffering purges us and brings intimate and pure knowledge and consequently the purest and highest joy that we can know.⁸ The words of the Master begin to be realized even in this life: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,"⁹ into the very beatitude of God Himself, knowing Him as He knows Himself and loving Him as He loves Himself.

Who would say that this lofty doctrine, drawn from the well of contemplation and charity, is in some way opposed to St. Thomas'? The Angelic Doctor most surely has a different way of approach and of expression; he follows an abstract and speculative method, disengaging from the spiritual life in the concrete the great universal laws of spirituality, the highest and most universal principles concerning grace, faith, hope, and charity, together with the corresponding gifts of the Holy Ghost. What is striking about him is his genius for perfect balance and measure and harmony, which, precisely because perfect, in no way lessen the sublimity of the end to be attained.

St. John of the Cross was not a speculative theologian seeking to harmonize the facts of revelation with the findings of sound philosophy but a great contemplative who gave more time to prayer than to study, who often passed entire nights in pure and loving contemplation, translated at last into a spiritual canticle of marvelous beauty. Instead of abstracting from concrete spiritual life the notions and principles relative to the virtues in general and to each theological virtue

⁸ *The Spiritual Canticle*, Peers tr., II, 383.

⁹ Matt. 25: 21.

together with each one's correlative gift, instead of composing distinct treatises on grace, faith, hope, and charity, he has done just the reverse: he has reunited these notions and principles as they are found in the concrete case of a perfect spiritual life, flourishing at once with living faith, abandonment, and love.

St. Thomas shows the nature and properties of the theological virtues, insisting on their essentially supernatural character because of their formal object. St. John of the Cross shows us their growth to full development, when their three formal motives shine out like three great stars glowing with increasing clarity in the night of the soul. As we pointed out in the introduction to this work, it is because of their different viewpoints and methods that these two doctrines serve to clarify each other. There is no question of making a clumsy attempt to effect a reconciliation between them but of listening to what two doctors of the Church both have to tell us on the same subject, each speaking from his own point of view and for our great profit.

St. John of the Cross teaches us much, showing what is contained virtually in some of the principles so well formulated by St. Thomas. He gives us knowledge of profound things, because, as he says in the prologue of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, he wishes to give us solid and substantial instruction, as being as well suited to one kind of person as to another, if we make up our minds to arrive at detachment of spirit by the narrow way: as he himself expresses it, he desires to lead contemplatives to the highest union by the most direct road.

His sublime doctrine conforms perfectly with what St.

Thomas tells us of the imitation of Jesus Christ, the virtues of the purified soul,¹⁰ the higher degrees of humility,¹¹ patience,¹² the spirit of faith,¹³ confidence in God, and charity.¹⁴ These two doctors of the Church meet on common ground in their profound understanding of the Psalms, the Book of Job,¹⁵ Jeremias, and Isaias, and in their penetrating grasp of the same texts in St. Paul: "Laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us, let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us: looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God. For think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself; that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds. For you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. . . . God dealth with you as with His sons . . . for our profit, that we might receive His sanctification."¹⁶

The two doctors whom we have followed have drawn their profound knowledge of the cross of Jesus from the same source, of which St. Paul before them drank deeply when he set down these words of the Master, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity," himself then adding: "Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessi-

¹⁰ Ia IIae, q. 61, a. 5.

¹¹ IIa IIae, q. 161, a. 6, ad 3um.

¹² IIIa, q. 46, a. 5.

¹³ *Comm. in Ep. ad Hebraeos* 11; 1-40 per totum.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Also IIa IIae, q. 27; q. 184, a. 3.

¹⁵ St. Thomas' commentary on the Book of Job is too little known and should be read. See especially what he has to say on the texts 1: 22; 7: 3; 19: 21.

¹⁶ Heb. 12: 3.

ties, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then am I powerful."¹⁷ "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. . . . For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal."¹⁸

¹⁷ II Cor. 12: 9.

¹⁸ II Cor. 4: 18.

CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY GHOST

O Holy Spirit, divine Spirit of light and love, to Thee I consecrate my understanding, my heart, my will, my whole being for time and for eternity.

May my understanding be ever submissive to Thy divine inspirations and to the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church of which Thou are the infallible guide; may my heart be ever inflamed with love of God and of neighbor; may my will be ever conformed to the divine will and may my whole life be a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and with Thee, O Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

CONSECRATION OF THE SOUL TO THE HOLY GHOST

(Prayer of St. Catherine of Siena written by her own hand and preserved at Siena)

“O Holy Spirit, come into my heart, by thy power draw me to Thyself and grant me charity with fear.

“Keep me, O ineffable Love, from every evil thought, warm and kindle me with Thy sweetest love so that every suffering may seem light to me.

“My heavenly Father, help me this day in every act. Jesus Love! Jesus Love!”

THE WAY OF THE CROSS ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS¹

1. *Jesus is condemned to death*

God's justice and infinite mercy lie hidden beneath men's injustice. The Father delivered up His Son to death when He inspired Him to offer Himself for us at the very moment when He came into the world. By sending His Son to death and giving Him up to the torment of the cross, the Father willed to glorify Him by having Him obtain the greatest of all victories, His triumph over sin and Satan, a hidden victory, far greater than that which He achieved on Easter by the resurrection, His victory over death being a striking sign, but only a sign and effect, of the victory that preceded it.

Redemption, and redemption through the cross, is the very motive of the Incarnation. First and foremost Jesus is the Savior “*qui propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis et incarnatus est.*” Let us ask Him to bring us to some understanding of the motive of the Incarnation, a motive of mercy responding to our misery. From all eternity sin was permitted only in view of a greater good, and the Savior's mercy in lifting us up from our fall is the most beautiful manifestation of the all-powerful goodness of God: “And where sin abounded, grace did more abound.”

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred

¹ Ia, q. 20, a. 4, ad 2um; IIIa, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3um; q. 7, a. 9; q. 15, a. 5, 6; q. 46-51.

wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

2. *Jesus is made to bear His cross*

In bearing His cross Jesus makes an interior offering of Himself for us; the fullness of the gift of self is achieved in the complete sacrifice, the perfect holocaust which is about to be consumed. The transports of St. Andrew when faced with his cross, of St. Ignatius when he gave expression to his desire to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, are but feeble echoes of Christ's ardent desire, invested as He was with the fullness of grace for the accomplishment of His mission as the Redeemer of sinful mankind. This fullness of grace acted like a weight in His soul drawing Him toward Calvary, a "*pondus crucis*"; it drove deep into Him an unfathomable attraction for the cross, the ardor of His love leading Him to that sacrifice which would render all glory to God and accomplish the salvation of men: "Love is the weight that draws me."

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

3. *Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross*

Jesus falls, not because He is overcome by weariness against His will but because His love aspires to the farthest limits of suffering that we may know His love for us. He wills to experience not only a holy enthusiasm for His oblation because of the abundant grace that is His but to become acquainted with overwhelming anguish that He may offer it up in the pure intensity of His supernatural love for the Father and for us.

Men lay the cross upon Jesus. He is absolutely innocent; yet He sees the justice of God in men's injustice. If we who are guilty of so many hidden faults with which no one reproaches us happen to suffer some injustice from others, let us see in it God's purifying justice.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

4. *Jesus meets His Blessed Mother*

Who knows better than Mary the motive of our Lord's sufferings, the love with which He bore them, and their value for our souls?

Let us ask the Blessed Mother to help us understand the mystery of the cross that we may accept and carry our cross not in revolt and vexation but with thankfulness and then with love, or at least with the beginning of love, which will keep on increasing through daily Communion, by personal merit and by love itself, which by its own action obtains an increase of grace. After the Savior no one else can so well obtain for us a wholly supernatural understanding of the mystery of the cross as the Immaculate Virgin; and no one else can so clearly reveal to us its effect upon our daily life.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

5. *Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry His cross*

What would we have said if we had met our Lord carrying His cross and He had asked us, "Will you help Me?" Today when a cross comes to us, it is Jesus who comes, Jesus who loves us, Jesus who desires to reproduce in us His own traits,

Jesus whom we love. Just as the first cause does not rob secondary causes of their usefulness, so our Savior's redemptive action does not render our efforts useless but on the contrary brings them into being and communicates to them their salutary and meritorious value.

We fail to realize how much we need the cross for our own purification and for the humble measure of work which God is good enough to let us do for the salvation of our neighbor. In a sense Jesus continues His agony to the end of the world in His mystical body, offering to let us help Him by carrying the cross prepared for us from all eternity and adapted by Him to our strength as sustained by His grace. We all have a cross, just as we all have a predominant fault and a particular supernatural attraction; our cross may be some sickness, some worry, or some other special trial. Through contemplation and love our cross becomes healing for us and radiant for others, helping them to carry their own holily. We really know others only when we know the cross they carry. The hidden apostolate exercised by contemplative souls consists chiefly in helping others to bear their cross by prayer and immolation.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

6. *Veronica wipes the face of Jesus*

Our Lord's expression, the look in His eyes especially, speaks His thoughts and His love. What are His thoughts? From the first moment of the Incarnation Jesus possessed the beatific vision in His soul, beholding the immediate vision of the divine essence, which constitutes the joy of the blessed

in heaven. He preserved this vision even during the sorrows of the passion, during the great grief that He endured at the sight of the sins of all men, which He had taken upon Himself to expiate. Our Lord's sacred face, His look, expressed highest peace and deepest sorrow. Sentiments so opposed as to seem even contrary and contradictory arose from the same source, that is, the fullness of His grace, which was itself the result of the uncreated grace of the personal union with the Word.

Our Savior's fullness of grace acted as the principle of the beatifying light of glory in His soul, as the principle of His great love, happier in giving than in receiving, and of His suffering at the sight of men's sins, which caused Him anguish in proportion to His love.

The sacred face of the Savior is the face of the Master of masters, the Master of apostles and doctors and of great contemplatives; it may be marked with bruises and spittle, but it loses nothing of its nobility and greatness and bears the reflection of His sacred soul, which even in this life contemplated the divine essence unveiled and looked upon the life of eternity to which He was leading us. But He willed to confine the light of glory to the summit of His intellect and gave Himself up to every humiliation and opprobrium during that hour when Veronica came forward to wipe His blood-stained face.

Lord, help us to strike the right mean between depressing sadness and feigned optimism and teach us to suffer for love of Thee and give us peace in suffering. My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

7. *Jesus falls the second time*

It would be a serious mistake to believe that Jesus suffered only in His sensory powers, those which we share in common with the animals. Jesus suffered most of all because of sin, the greatest of evils, a spiritual affliction to be found in the higher faculties. Jesus suffered because of the sins of all men of every race and time. And His suffering was proportionate to His wisdom: He knew better than anyone else the number and gravity of men's crimes; they lay open before Him somewhat as we see the purulent sores of a body consumed with disease. His immense love of God, whom sin offends, and for our souls, which sin ravages and destroys, served also as the measure of His suffering. From this source sprang the sorrow that prostrated and crushed Him and surpassed the grief of all contrite hearts, afflicted for their sins. Jesus' fullness of grace augmented His capacity for suffering, whereas the egoism that keeps us living on the surface of ourselves, allows us to find pain only in whatever touches us personally and renders us incapable of supernatural suffering arising out of love of God and souls, an anguish unknown to superficial minds.

Lord, give us great sorrow for our sins. My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

8. *Jesus consoles the daughters of Jerusalem*

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me. . . ." No one takes My life away from Me. I give it freely. Nothing can give

you so striking a proof of My love for you as My Passion. Through the mystery of the cross, God tells you of His love for goodness and His hatred of evil, of injustice in every form. My grievous Passion makes known to you also My Father's ardent love for Me in willing to glorify Me with victory over sin. Lastly, it expresses His incomprehensible love for your souls, since to save them, He delivered up His own beloved Son.

"Weep for yourselves. . . ." Blessed are they who weep the holy tears of contrition. Weep not for your crosses, which serve to purify you and make you free, but weep for your sins. "If any man will come after Me, let him . . . take up his cross. . . ." There is no other way to follow Me. "Weep for your children . . .," for all who fail to understand, who curse and blaspheme the divine mystery of the cross.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

9. *Jesus falls the third time*

Jesus saw plainly the whole plan of Providence and could not suffer because of the divine permission for evil, holy as it is and ordered to the manifestation of mercy and justice; but He suffered beyond all reckoning because of sin itself. He willed to drink to the dregs the terrible chalice presented to Him in Gethsemane and containing all the shame and iniquity of the world, taking it for Himself and giving us in exchange the chalice of His precious blood, a blessed cup filled to overflowing with grace issuing from His bruised heart. These two chalices form the two scales of a balance, one containing all goodness and the other all evil and they

sum up and show forth the whole profound story of sinning and redeemed mankind.

Jesus is going to give us the chalice of His precious blood shed for us, but for Himself He wills no mitigation of His sufferings. He prevents the light of glory beatifying the summit of His soul from shining down on the lower part of His higher faculties and on His sensuous appetency, limiting it to the peak of His intellect, as if He were to cease hearing the countless choir of the elect chanting, "O happy fault! Where sin abounded, grace did more abound." He gives Himself up to suffering that He may expiate our sins. His imminent triumph is not allowed to assuage His grief as He falls once more face downward on the ground, just as He fell in the Garden of Olives.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

10. Jesus is stripped of His garments

Our Lord's garments adhere to the wounds made by the scourging and, as they are torn off, His body flames with pain. This exterior and humiliating divestment symbolizes another and interior divestment which our Lord asks of us. We ought to strip ourselves of that self compounded of egoism, self-love under all its many forms, and of pride, that we may be clothed with humility and divine charity, which will enlarge our hearts and give them in a sense the great-heartedness of God by making us love everything as He loves it.

The saints understand the lesson of inner divestment, renouncing themselves and in a sense losing their own per-

sonality in the very personality of God. The spirit of faith rules their minds; God's judgments and God's will take the place of their own; they have become servants of God in somewhat the same way that our hand is the servant of our will. At the same time they have reached a kind of independence of all things created and rule over them with God, who makes all things, even evil, work together unto good.

Above and beyond the saints, our Lord not only divested Himself of all judgments except God's, all desires other than God's, but He also has no human "I" or self at the root of His faculties, at the base of His sacred soul. In its stead reigns the sovereignly adorable "I" of the Word made flesh, possessed from all eternity of the divine nature and in time taking upon Himself human nature that He may become our Savior.

We should not consider it a deprivation for Jesus to have no human self: it is, quite the contrary, a supreme perfection. The full development of human personality consists in making ourselves more and more independent of what is inferior to us and more and more dependent upon God; the full development of human personality consists in losing ourselves in a sense in the personality of God by an ever more intimate union; in Jesus this is identity. He Himself says to us, "Let Me live in thee and die in thee."

The uncreated person of the Word made flesh is the principle of the infinite value of His merits and His reparative death. Seen from above, as God and His angels behold it, how glorious is the cross of Christ!

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

11. *Jesus is nailed to the cross*

St. Luke tells us: "And when they were come to the place called Calvary, they crucified Him there: and the robbers, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." How different are these three crosses! Lord, never let ours be useless like the bad thief's, make them like the good thief's, the convert thief's, and even more than that, like Thine own.

The words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them . . .," express the highest act of fortitude and meekness combined. In the midst of His sufferings He not only preserves the profoundest peace within Himself but communicates its overflowing abundance to the most afflicted and erring of men, provided that they do not refuse the light. At the very moment when His executioners crucify Him He is meriting grace for them and asking the Father that they may have eternal life. Many martyrs will repeat His prayer, and it will serve as evidence that their strength and their perfect charity toward their persecutors are not simply human but truly divine. Thus the Savior's great prayer and suffering is continued, so to speak, in the mystical body until the end of time. If we must suffer from another, let us pray for him; if on our part we make others suffer, let us think that perhaps God inspires them to pray for us; let us remember that He most certainly prayed for us who were the cause of His death.

Because the crucifixion was our Lord's hour, His great hour and the highest point of the whole history of the world, let us look at every moment of our lives in relation to it, that we may be faithful to the grace of the present moment. Then let us see each minute not merely in the horizontal plane of

fleeting time, poised between a past which is gone and must be left at God's mercy and a future which is shrouded in uncertainty for us, but let us live in the present moment in a higher and more realistic way, seeing it in the vertical order, as it connects with the unique instant of changeless eternity, that moment of eternal dawn which never passes. We shall then come to know the infinite riches of the present moment. It slips away, but my body keeps on existing and my soul too, together with the grace which urges it, the influence of the Savior, and the three divine persons indwelling within me, provided I am in the state of grace. The present moment, no matter how laborious and lackluster it may appear, holds an infinite treasure; let us live it in such a way as to make it part of eternity, preparing for a good death, a sacrifice of adoration, of reparation, and of thanksgiving in union with our Lord.

Let us pray for those in their agony and those undergoing severe trials. My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

12. *Jesus dies on the cross*

Agonized and overwhelmed with suffering, Jesus preserved that peace which is the tranquillity of the order that His love restores to us. His last words express deep and radiant peace.

To the good thief: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise": a word of peace to all great penitents, that they may know themselves pardoned.

To Mary and to John: "Woman, behold thy son. . . . Behold thy mother": words producing what they signify, greatly

increasing the Virgin's motherly love for all redeemed souls represented by the beloved apostle.

The cry of unequalled sorrow: "My God, my God, why hast thou abandoned me?" is the first verse of Psalm 21, the Messianic psalm consummated in perfect abandonment by Him who restores peace to the world and bears in our stead the malediction due to sin.

"I thirst": the Savior thirsts for souls and He Himself leads them to the living water of grace to purify, refresh, and save them.

"It is consummated": the perfect holocaust prefigured by the sacrifices of the Old Law is offered; it will be perpetuated in substance in the holy Mass until the end of the world. His fullness of grace made Jesus desire to suffer for us even to this extremity and it now overflows on all souls not closed against God's love.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit": these words consecrate and offer the sacrifice of the cross. Because the boundless love of the Word made flesh inspires His oblation, it has an infinitely meritorious and satisfactory value and achieves more to please God than all the sins of all men accomplish to displease Him.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

*13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
and laid in the arms of His Mother*

The Blessed Virgin and, in some measure, those who remained faithful, St. John and the holy women, apprehended the mystery accomplished on Calvary, the ardent love of the

Son of God offering Himself for us, the victory achieved over sin and Satan. Receiving into her arms the body of her Son, Mary glimpsed by faith to some extent God's infinite mercy for sinners and she adores the divine justice to which Jesus made perfect reparation.

What shall we ask of Mary, now that the sufferings of the cross have passed and their immense worth becomes more and more apparent? Let us not have the presumption to ask for crosses, which we might perhaps carry imperfectly, but let us ask of the Virgin of sorrows love for those crosses made ready for us from all eternity. Give us, O Lord, love for them, whatever they may be and even if they must be carried in lonely martyrdom of heart and soul and mind; give us the grace not to exaggerate our crosses but to bear them just as they are and will be, without turning in upon ourselves, and simply out of love for Thee, Lord, and for souls. Mary Immaculate will lead us to bear them with more ease and perhaps with more merit, for she will obtain for us an increase of charity, the principle of merit, and help us efficaciously by consoling us in our struggles.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls.

14. Jesus is placed in the sepulcher

The Savior's body rests in the tomb; in three days it will rise again. Through the cross Jesus has won the greatest of all triumphs, the victory over sin and Satan, and He can say to His disciples: "In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world." During the agonies of the Passion He remained the great Peacemaker,

pouring out upon us the river of divine mercies. The resurrection or victory over death comes as a striking sign of that incomparably greater victory won over sin on Good Friday. "Sin entered into the world, and by sin death," death being a chastisement for sin. By the transcendent logic of supernatural mysteries, He who has vanquished sin should also defeat death. In prayer let us ask for understanding of this mystery that we may live more and more for God through, in, and with Christ.

My Jesus, pardon and mercy, by the merits of Thy sacred wounds. Father, we offer Thee the wounds of Thy Son for the healing of our wounded souls. Amen.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

(Seen in the light of the principle: The fullness of grace in Jesus and Mary served as a source of peace and of reparative suffering)

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES

1. *The annunciation*

"*Ave, gratia plena.*" From the moment of her immaculate conception, Mary received an initial plenitude of grace exceeding that given to all the saints and angels together. Her soul outshone all others, a diamond among lesser jewels. The plenitude of faith, of hope, and of charity that never left off growing in her was given to Mary because of her unique mission in the world as the Mother of God, her divine motherhood surpassing the order of grace and attaining in a sense to the hypostatic order constituted by the personal union of the humanity of Jesus with the Word of God.

This mystery of the Incarnation was announced to Mary and, enlightened by God, she spoke her *Fiat* with great faith, great peace, and great courage, for she had a presentiment of what sufferings her Son would undergo in fulfilling what the prophets had foretold. After the *Fiat*, at the moment when the mystery of the Incarnation was realized, the coming of the Word greatly increased Mary's initial fullness of charity. Mary therefore participated and will always participate

more fully than anyone else in the effects produced by the yet higher fullness of charity received into Christ's sacred soul at the time of His incarnation. The Word became incarnate to save us by dying on the cross for us. In His sacred soul and in Mary's the fullness of grace produced two apparently contrary but intimately united effects, a deep peace which should find its reflection in us, and a desire for the cross which would continue to heighten until the hour of the *Consummatum est*.

2. *The visitation*

Mary saluted Elizabeth and, as St. Luke recounts, as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the infant which she bore leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Ghost. Lifting up her voice she cried: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy."

Mary, who was to give birth to the Savior, brought grace to Elizabeth and to the unborn precursor. Mary herself had been redeemed in an absolutely exceptional manner by the future merits of her Son and she concurred in the redemption of us all. From the moment of her immaculate conception she had been redeemed by a sovereign redemption, being preserved from original sin instead of being healed of it. It was fitting that a perfect Redeemer should accomplish a sovereign and preservative redemption in at least one soul, and in that soul more closely associated with Him than any other in the work of man's salvation. Truly, what Jesus merited for us in justice, Mary has merited for us with Him

and in Him and by Him through the merit of congruity. In this sense it has pleased our Lord that no one should be saved except in consideration of the merits of His Mother. In the same sense it has pleased Him to sanctify the precursor by Mary's words.

3. *The nativity*

The Blessed Virgin's fullness of grace increased still more with the birth of the Savior, when she had the immense joy of giving Him to the world.

Let us relinquish joys which are often all too human and sometimes even dangerous, joys which estrange us from God, that we may live in the high and pure joy springing from the good news of the gospel. The angel said to the shepherds who were guarding their flocks at night: "Behold, I bring to you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for, this day is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David." The mystery of the Incarnation brings us the joy of the real presence of God among us, of God who continues to live in our midst in the Eucharist. The first effect of grace then begins to radiate upon us all: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will."

4. *The presentation of Jesus in the Temple*

On the day of the annunciation Mary said her *Fiat* in peace, with both joy and grief, having some foreknowledge of the Savior's sufferings, so plainly foretold by Isaias. The Blessed Virgin's grief increased when she was directly enlightened by the prophecy of the aged Simeon clearly predicting: "Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted;

And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed."

Presenting her Son in the Temple, Mary offered Him for us in sorrow; her suffering was, however, intimately united to the profound joy which she experienced when she heard Simeon's words of peace: "Now thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace: because my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel."

5. *The finding of Jesus in the Temple*

Our Lord said to Mary and Joseph: "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Mary accepted in the obscurity of faith what she could not yet understand, the meaning and depth of the mystery of the Redemption being progressively revealed to her. To find Jesus was a joy, but a joy that carried a foreboding of much suffering.

In the life story of souls joy comes at the beginning with the glimpse of the desired and distant goal, but afterward our Lord makes us understand that we must adopt austere means to reach it. There should be three great acts in the life of a soul: the joyous desire for the happiness of heaven, the continually renewed choice of the means leading there, although they may often be painful, and the possession of the end achieved. These great acts correspond to the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the Rosary, a school for contemplation leading us gently to the living, enlightening, and activating contemplation governing all action.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

1. *The agony in the garden*

In His overwhelming sorrow, Jesus remained in perfect conformity to God's will: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Let us compare Jesus' sorrow with ours. We often fashion our own griefs, which lack reason and foundation. At other times our imprudent actions and faults have painful and well merited consequences against which we rebel. It also happens that our Lord sends us very afflicting trials for our purification, and these too, sad to say, are rarely borne well. Let us contemplate our two great models, Jesus and Mary, and we shall understand that the real evil which should give us concern is to be found in the sins that we have committed and in their consequences, wrongdoing which results in the loss of souls. Our Lord suffered because of them according to the measure of His love for His offended Father and for us who have offended Him.

Let us beg Him to teach us how to suffer in a way profitable not only for ourselves but for others as well. Out of something apparently useless, suffering, Christ's love once fashioned something abundantly fruitful for good. He now in a sense continues His agony until the end of the world in His mystical body, in His cross-bearing members; and the mystical body can no more dispense with reparative suffering, a reflection of Christ's own, than our eyes can do without the light of the sun.

In Gethsemane Jesus wept because of our sins; they made Him suffer a bloody sweat. Let us ask Him for deep and true sorrow for our sins, the holy tears of contrition, spoken of in the beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

2. *The scourging*

By His wounds Jesus expiated for the guilty voluptuousness of men. He is struck, and we are healed. Mary, who saw her Son scourged for us, was not healed but preserved by Him from original sin and its blighting effects. She never knew our sad concupiscence. Sovereignly redeemed by Him, she gave Him the pure blood now shed under the lashes of His executioners that we may be cured of the concupiscence of the flesh, which turns us from God, brings families to ruin and nations to desolation.

*Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Jesum in tormentis
Et flagellis subditum.*

3. *The crowning of thorns*

Jesus was crowned with thorns in cruelty and derision but the painful crown by which He expiated for our sins of pride flowered into a crown of glory for Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. And Mary, who saw Him go by bearing His crown of thorns, became associated with Him in His glory. "And the king loved her more than all . . . and he set the royal crown on her head" (Esther 2: 17). Before having her share in His final victory, our Lord allied her with Him in His sufferings, in the intimate peace that continued

in the depth of their hearts in spite of everything, and in His desire to be immolated as a perfect holocaust for the salvation of men. The peace of our thorn-crowned Lord not only remained in the depth of His own soul but for two thousand years has radiated on all who meditate in their hearts on His passion and on the humility of both Mother and Son. As Blessed Grignon de Montfort says, the demon, who is pride personified, suffers more by being vanquished by Mary's humility than if he were immediately put down by the all-powerful God.

The humble and thorn-crowned Jesus will be uplifted above all. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven and on earth, and under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father."

4. *The carrying of the cross*

"If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

We ought to carry our cross in union with our Savior. When we bear it holily, it brings us a sweetness which the world cannot know. If we never come to carry our cross as we should, it is because our desire for eternal life wants for strength, life, and ardor. If we recoil before the harshness of the means, it is because our desire for the end lacks energy. We must reanimate our desire, asking the Blessed Virgin to increase it in us, together with our faith, hope, and charity. Then our crosses, because they are carried with more love,

have less pain and more merit for us. Charity, the principle of merit, lightens the Savior's yoke upon us.

Lord, transform our trials. So often they weigh us down profitlessly; let them bring us onward to our end and become for us and for others a pledge of eternal salvation.

The carrying of the cross reminds us, as it has been said, that life holds but one real misfortune, more evident in times of sorrow and danger than at others, the misfortune of not being a saint. We are absolutely sure of not having to bear more than we are able, God's grace aiding us. We are also sure of our guide and have but to follow in His footsteps.

5. *The crucifixion*

Jesus is going to die in terrible physical and moral suffering, and the apostles, with the exception of St. John, have left Him. The Mother of Sorrows stands at the cross making the greatest act of faith and hope that has ever existed. The Crucified has more than faith and hope: He preserves even in His anguish the vision of the divine essence. But He limits its glory to the apex of His intellect that He may give Himself up to sorrow. He seems overcome, His work appears destroyed, even His disciples have all fled. Not for an instant, however, does Mary cease to believe that He is the Savior, the Word of God made flesh, and that He will arise again in three days as He foretold. She has a greater understanding of the seven words that He spoke than anyone else could ever have. She offers to the Father a Son whom she not only cherishes but rightly adores. With all the love which she is capable of she offers to the Father the still greater love of Him who hangs dying on the cross for us. Because of this offering she has received a final plenitude of grace constitut-

ing her more than ever the Mother of men, the co-redemptrix, the universal mediatrix.

To Mary who "bore the death of Christ within her" let us say *Fac ut portem Christi mortem*. Let us ask her to share with us the two great effects of her fullness of grace: peace and the desire for the cross. May she help us to love the cross as all the saints have loved it; may she obtain for us an ever livelier and deeper understanding of the mystery of the Redemption and of the infinite value of the Mass by which it is perpetuated upon our altars.

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

1. *The resurrection*

Jesus is victor over death because on the cross He vanquished sin and Satan. He could say to His apostles, "I have overcome the world," for He had overcome that spirit of the world which is compounded of concupiscence and pride. We have in the resurrection a striking evidence of this victory. Is not death the result and punishment of sin? Victory over death then follows as the result of victory over sin, a fact which led St. Paul to say, "And if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins."

Such is the meaning of the resurrection and of the glorious mysteries following after it. The joyful mysteries speak the delight springing from the first eager desire for the end seen afar off; the sorrowful mysteries remind us of the severe means that we must use in daily carrying our cross; the glorious mysteries tell us of our final conquest, introducing us into eternal life, our destination and last end. Toward this glory all our joys and sorrows should be directed, as Jesus and

Mary directed all the joys of His childhood and all the sorrows of His passion, uniting in offering the same holocaust. Let us contemplate these two great models and consider how we ought to imitate them every day of our lives, striving always more generously toward the end to which they desire to bring us.

2. *The ascension*

Jesus was lifted up to heaven and placed on the right hand of the Father, where He will reign forever over the minds and hearts of men. With Him the souls of the just entered heaven to enjoy the beatific vision according to the measure of their merits and the degree of their charity. The Blessed Virgin had a degree of charity higher than that of all the saints together. Why did she not follow her Son immediately? She remained with the Church militant as its animating, suffering, meriting heart, sustaining the apostles in their difficult labors. Our Lord deprived the apostles of His visible presence, but He left them His mother for their consolation. The new-born Church owed its development to the past merits of the Savior and also in Him, by Him, and with Him, to the prayer and suffering love of the Blessed Virgin, the spiritual mother of all men.

3. *Pentecost*

The Holy Ghost descended visibly in the form of tongues of fire on the Blessed Virgin and the apostles. Let us think of this new increase of grace produced in Mary's soul. As the falling stone drops earthward with greater and greater speed as the earth's attraction increases, the Blessed Virgin's soul

was drawn more strongly to God as she drew nearer to Him. The initial plenitude of charity which she received at the moment of her immaculate conception surpassed that of all the great saints. What a marvelous upsurge of love she must have known as her life went on! The law of gravity is only a kind of reflection of an incomparably higher law ruling the tendency of all creatures, especially spirits, to God. If they freely follow the double inclination of nature and of grace, spirits tend toward God with ever increasing love until they reach Him, their journey's end. The nearer they come to God, the more He attracts them: a truth we see verified on the day of Pentecost in the souls of the apostles but especially in Mary's soul for no sin or imperfection held back the flight of her charity.

If the sacerdotal character was not given to her, she did receive the fullness of the spirit of the priesthood, the spirit of the redeeming Christ, and this she transmitted to the apostles, whom her prayer and interior immolation were to sustain in their great labors and struggles.

Through the hands of the most Blessed Virgin, let us consecrate ourselves to the Holy Ghost, asking Him to make us henceforth docile to His precious inspirations, which we have so often wasted. Let us also ask for apostles, strong priestly vocations, begging for many, but above all, for generous workers. Our Lord desires more than we do to perpetuate His priesthood and to save souls; we shall greatly please His divine heart by obtaining through Him, with Him, and in Him efficacious graces for the formation of a chosen and faithful following who will continue worthily the apostolate of His first disciples and apostles, using the same supernatural means which they used.

4. *The assumption*

The Blessed Virgin died of love, her soul ravished out of her body by the strength of her love for God. Swept up to heaven by the flight of her charity, her soul was not long separated from her body, which had no contact either with original or actual sin and was not to become acquainted with the corruption of the tomb. Our Lord advanced the day of resurrection for His Blessed Mother, making her His companion in His victory over death because she was more closely associated with Him than anyone else in His victory over sin on Calvary.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Through the merits of thy Son and through thy intercession for us we can work out our salvation. Make us understand that for those who love the Lord and love Him unto the end, all things work together unto good, *omnia cooperantur in bonum*. Make us to be numbered among those who continue to love until the end; obtain for us the grace of final perseverance, the grace of a good death. Then we shall see that through God's goodness, the merits of thy Son, and thy prayers, everything in our lives has turned into good; everything—natural qualities, efforts, all the graces received since baptism, all the absolutions and Communions, all the defeats and crosses and contradictions, and even all the sins, for, as St. Augustine says, the Lord permits sin in the life of His elect only that He may bring them to a deeper knowledge of themselves, to true humility, that rising again after their fall, they may go on to greater gratitude and love.

5. *The coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

The Blessed Mother is exalted above the choirs of angels: "*exaltata est super choros angelorum, ad celestia regna.*" As we can form no idea of the final plenitude of charity which her holy soul possessed at the hour of death, neither can we determine the corresponding brilliance of the light of glory which she received nor the intensity of her vision into the most holy depths of the divine essence. She is queen of angels, of patriarchs, of prophets, of apostles, of martyrs, of confessors, of virgins, and of all saints, but she ever remains more our mother than our queen.

Let us keep asking her continually until death for the grace of the present moment. This is the grace that we beg of her when we pray, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now. . . . We plead for this most particular grace, which changes with each changing moment, makes us equal to the duties of the whole day, and opens our minds to the greatness of all those small things that bear a relationship to eternity. When we say "now" even if we may be distracted, Mary is not and listens to us, graciously receiving our prayer, and the grace necessary for us to continue praying, suffering, or doing at the present moment comes to us like a breath of air. Let us ask for the grace to live to the full the richness of the passing moment, especially the time of prayer. We can fall into a hasty and mechanical way of saying the Rosary and the Divine Office that militates against contemplation. Preserve us, O Mary, from such materialism. During the present escaping moment not only our body and its impressionable appetites exist but our spiritual soul lives too and Christ lives and exerts His influence over us and the Blessed Trinity lives

and dwells within us. Let us abandon to God's infinite mercy everything in our past and in our future and live practically and sublimely in the present moment, seeing in this fleeting now, whether it be dull or joyful or full of pain, a distant image of the unique instant of changeless eternity and, because of the actual grace which it contains, a living proof of God's fatherly goodness.

Deign, O Blessed Virgin, to make us recognize the holy demands of God's love for us at the present moment of our lives: He requires more of us now than before, because grace is meant to go on increasing until the time of death and, if we follow the divine plan, our whole life will be a direct journey to eternity, traveled ever more and more quickly as God draws us more and more strongly to Himself.

INDEX

- Abandonment to God's will, pure hope and, II, 56
- Acceleration: of approach to God, I, 132, 367, 387; of falling bodies, I, 128
- Acquired contemplation and infused contemplation, II, 122 note
- Acquired virtues and infused virtues, I, 273
- Activity, natural: dangers of, I, 300, 310; mortification of, I, 309-17
- "Activity, natural": meaning of, I, 309
- Acts, meritorious: increase of charity and, I, 365-80
- Affective charity to effective charity, II, 48
- Alphonsus, St.: views of St. Thomas and of, II, 228
- Alphonsus, St., spirituality of, II, 229-34; and doctrine of St. John of the Cross, II, 234-67; and principles of St. Thomas, II, 234-67
- L'Amour de la divine Sagesse* by de Montfort, I, 315
- Anathema, St. Paul's willingness to be, I, 124
- Angela of Foligno, Blessed: humility of, II, 128
- Angels: circular movement of, II, 114; knowledge of themselves, II, 207 note; St. Augustine on good and bad, I, 120; sin of the, I, 103
- Anselm, St.: on degrees of humility, II, 128
- Apostolate, defects of those in the, II, 9
- Apostolic life, the: difficulty of, II, 269-73; special end of, II, 273-82; sublimity of, II, 268-90; superiority of, II, 269-73; unity of, II, 268-90
- Apostolic orders, elements of religious life in, II, 282-90
- Apprehension of God, natural immediate, I, 168 ff.
- Aridity, II, 13 f.: in beginners, II, 27 ff.; benefits of, II, 42; after purgative way, II, 78; sensible, II, 10
- Aristotle: on love of self, I, 105 ff.; on man's end, I, 89
- Die Aszetik des hl. Alfons* by Keusch, II, 229
- Atwood on speed of falling bodies, I, 127
- Augustine, St.: on Christian perfection, I, 30; definition of sin, I, 333; definition of virginity, I, 345; good and bad angels, I, 120
- Ave Maria by dying soldier, II, 363
- Baius on nature and grace, I, 77
- Baptism: concupiscence after, I, 264; effects of, I, 263; and sacrament of penance compared, I, 280
- Beatific vision, intensity of participation in, I, 375
- Beatific vision, Christ's: and the cross, I, 196 ff.
- Beatitudes, I, 302
- Beauty, Plato on supreme, I, 32
- Beginners: aridity in, II, 28 ff.; hypocrisy of, II, 7; imperfections of, II, 6; study by, II, 8
- "Beginners," II, 80
- "Being, entire," I, 33 note
- Benedict Labre, St.: and his insulters, I, 50; humility of, II, 128
- Bernard, St.: *De diligendo Deo* by, I, 70; on pure love, I, 68 ff.
- Better, the: choice of, I, 331 ff.

- Book of Eternal Wisdom* by Suso, II, 270
 Bossuet: on the Mass, II, 312; on the priesthood of Christ, II, 310
 Butler, *Western Mysticism* by, I, 166
- Cajetan on love of God above self, I, 99
 Calvary, the lesson of, I, 216 ff.
 Capital sins, I, 248: examination of conscience with reference to, I, 288-92; outline of, I, 289
 Cardinal virtues, I, 294
 Catherine of Siena, St.: on consecration of virginity, I, 357; on the cooling of charity, I, 383; *The Dialogue* of, I, 357; on faith, II, 137; miraculous Communion of, I, 390
 "Cellars" of love of God, II, 80, 215
 Chardon, Louis
 on Christ's joy and grief, I, 215
La croix de Jésus by, I, 159, 161, 176
 on love of suffering, I, 218
 on *pondus crucis* and *pondus gloriae*, I, 182
 on presence of God, I, 163
 on transforming union, II, 222
 Charity (*see also* Love)
 acts of: and gift of wisdom, I, 398; meritorious, I, 372; in purgatory, I, 375
 effective: to effective charity, II, 48
 and gift of wisdom, I, 398
 growth of, I, 365-70
 how injured by venial sin, I, 382
 impaired by venial sin, I, 393
 increase of, I, 340: by acts of charity, I, 369 ff.
 increasing progress of, I, 52, 55
 indefinite growth of, I, 378
 more perfect in heaven than on earth, I, 379
 nature and, I, 119
 never lost in heaven, I, 385
 no one excluded from, I, 366
 order of: William of Auxerre on, I, 93; *see also* Pure love
 passive purification of, II, 161-75
- Charity (*continued*)
 perfection of: as man's end, I, 52, 55; two methods of reaching, 53
 possibility of perfect, I, 380
 progress in, I, 245
 purification of: essential features of, II, 162
 St. Catherine of Siena on cooling of, I, 383
 strengthened by knowledge of God, II, 46
 temptations against, II, 106, 121
 and venial sin, I, 381-86
 virtue of, II, 164
- Chastity: devotion to Mary a strength in temptations against, II, 61; Luther on vow of, I, 349; temptations in night of the senses, II, 51
- Christ
 beatitude and sorrow in soul of, I, 193 ff.
 everlasting oblation of, II, 386
 exemplar for our free will, II, 331-46
 free will of: St. Thomas on, II, 340
 note
 grief of, I, 204, 208
 harmony with the dying, I, 212 ff.
 and His Cross, I, 179
 His fullness of grace, I, 178: and desire for the Cross, I, 175-88
 influence on the mystical body, I, 231
 His liberty on earth, II, 336-41
 His oblation during His earthly life, II, 388
 His sufferings willed by, I, 187
 His unending intercession for us, II, 390
 impeccability of, II, 331-46
 impeccable liberty of, II, 331-46
 incorporation into, I, 228 ff.
 liberty of, II, 331-46
 mystical body of: offered at Mass, II, 399
 natures in: and personality of the Word, I, 177
 the Passion and peace of, I, 189-223
 peace and sorrow in the dying, I, 193 ff.

- Christ (*continued*)
 perfection of humanity of, I, 176
 present in Eucharist, II, 398
 priest and victim in the Mass, II, 391
 sensibility of body of, I, 203
 seven last words of, I, 189 ff.
 soul of: united to the Word, I, 176
 substantial identity of Mass and sacrifice of, II, 393
 sufferings of, I, 202 ff., 214
 supreme authority of, II, 325
 temptations of, I, 284
 two wills in, II, 331
 union of peace and sorrow in soul of, I, 206 ff.
 victimhood of, II, 171
- Christ, kingship of, II, 314-30
 basis of, II, 321-27
 excellence of, II, 321-27
 exercise of, II, 327-30
 exercised in the Church, II, 328
 Hugon on, II, 322
 in Scripture, II, 315-21
- Christ, priesthood of
 Bossuet on, II, 310
 in Epistle to the Hebrews, II, 293-97
 formal cause of, II, 308-13
 and life of union, II, 291-313
 perfection of, II, 297-308
 Pius XI on, II, 311
- Christian perfection: St. Augustine on, I, 30; St. Thomas on, I, 30
- Church, the mystical body of Christ, I, 226
- Circular movement of the angels, II, 114
- The Cloud of Unknowing*, II, 142
 note
 Commandment, the great: basis for, I, 29
- Communion: and arrested progress, I, 392; conditions for fervent, I, 395; of St. Catherine, miraculous, I, 390
 Communion, daily: effects of fervent, I, 389; increasing fervor of, I, 134; spiritual progress and, I, 387-99
- Communion, frequent: without apparent progress, I, 394
- Communion of saints, I, 234 ff.
- Concupiscence: after baptism, I, 264; remedy of, I, 273; St. Teresa's freedom from, II, 58; St. Thomas' freedom from, II, 58; temptations from, II, 57
- Conformity to will of God, I, 329
- Conscience, examination of: methods of, I, 287-98; with reference to capital sins, I, 288-92; with reference to hierarchy of virtues, I, 292-98
- Consecration of virgins, I, 351
- Consecration to Holy Ghost, II, 90, 420
- Consecrated virginity, I, 345-62
- Consolations: desire for, II, 178; lack of, II, 13
- Contemplation
 acquired and infused, II, 122
 note
 beginning of, II, 15, 17
 degrees of, II, 89
 infused, I, 255
 note: II, 110: attitude to, II, 34; from meditation to, II, 34; in normal way of sanctity, II, 47
 lower faculties suspended in, II, 86
 virginity and, I, 355
- Contrition: imperfect, I, 276; perfect, I, 276
- Conversion, St. Teresa's, II, 152
 note
 Coredeumprix, Mary as, I, 231
- Counsel: gift of, II, 81; and precept compared, I, 323
- Counsel, evangelical: of virginity, I, 346
- Credo written by St. Vincent de Paul, II, 107
- La croix de Jésus* by Chardon, I, 161; II, 159, 176
- Cross
 Christ and His, I, 179
 Christ's beatific vision and the, I, 196 ff.
 Christ's desire for the, I, 175-88
 imitation of Jesus and Mary in bearing our, II, 5
 its necessity for us, II, 4
 the lesson of the, I, 216 ff.
 love of God and mystery of the, I, 174-223
 Mary's understanding of the, II, 138

- "Cross, folly of the," I, 44
 Cross, Way of the: according to St. Thomas, II, 421-31
 Crosses: kinds of, II, 179; of the senses, II, 3-94; of the soul, II, 97-196; spiritual, II, 225
Crucis, pondus gloriae and *pondus*: Chardon on, I, 182
 Curé of Ars, inner torments of, II, 103, 127
 Dark light, II, 116 ff.
De diligendo Deo by St. Bernard, I, 70
De quatuor gradibus violentiae caritatis by Richard of St. Victor, I, 73
 Degrees
 of contemplation, II, 89
 of humility, II, 128
 of life: seven, II, 24
 of love: St. John of the Cross on, II, 80
 of love of God, II, 215
 Deification, II, 170
 Dereliction on the cross, I, 190
 Devil, temptation by the, I, 283; II, 147
 Director, spiritual: importance of learning in a, II, 29; prudence in, II, 29
 Disinterested love; *see* Pure love
 Dominic, St.: and hostile Albigensians, I, 50
 Dryness; *see* Aridity
 Dying to sin, sign of spiritual advance, I, 245
 Eagerness, natural, I, 310
 Eckhart on nothingness of creatures, I, 61
 Ecstasies, II, 89
 Effective charity, from affective charity to, II, 48
 Egoism, source of sin, I, 288
 Emotions, influence of, I, 105
 Encyclical *Studiorum duces*, I, 55
 End: mortification and our, I, 299-317; of our primordial inclination, I, 115; perfection of charity as man's, I, 52, 55
 Endurance, principal act of fortitude, II, 63

- Enemies, mortification of hatred toward, I, 304
 "Entire being," I, 33 note
 Eternity, immutability of, I, 386
 Eucharist, Christ in the, II, 398
 Evangelical counsel of virginity, I, 346
 Evil: choice of lesser, I, 327; God's permission of, I, 236; its depth within us, II, 4
 Examination of conscience: methods of, I, 287-98; quietists and, I, 291; with reference to capital sins, I, 288-92; with reference to hierarchy of virtues, I, 292-98; scrupulosity to be avoided, I, 291
 Experimental knowledge of self, I, 167
 External behavior, attention to, I, 296
 Faculties, lower: suspended in contemplation, II, 86
 Faith
 acquired and infused, II, 132
 defined, II, 130
 God's purification of our, II, 133 ff.
 life of: imperfections in way of, II, 130
 motive of infused, I, 22
 passive purification of, II, 123-43
 purification of: in lives of the saints, II, 139
 purification of the soul and purity of, II, 137
 St. Vincent de Paul's temptations against, II, 140
 temptations against, II, 106, 121, 211
 unenlightened, II, 131
 Fear of the Lord, gift of, II, 20
 Fewness of the perfect, II, 73
 Final perseverance, Mary and grace of, II, 348-54
 Flower of mortification, I, 345-62
 "Folly of the Cross," I, 44
Fomes peccati, I, 263, 271, 282
 Fortitude: endurance an act of, II, 63; gift of, II, 21; Ruysbroeck on gift of, II, 22; virtue of, I, 340
 Free will, exemplar of our, II, 331-46

- Free will of Christ, St. Thomas on, II, 340 note
 Friends, persecution from, II, 65
 Friendship, love of, I, 39, 68, 86
 Fruits of the Spirit, II, 78
 Galtier on quasi-experimental knowledge of God, I, 154 note
 Gardeil: on immediate experience of God's presence, I, 165; *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique* by, I, 140
 Gift: of counsel, II, 81; of knowledge, II, 43; of piety, II, 81; of understanding, II, 112 ff., 151, 173, 211; of wisdom, II, 205
 Gifts of Holy Ghost, Ruysbroeck on, II, 20
 God
 experience of presence of, I, 165 ff.
 general presence of, I, 137
 His love for us, I, 29-54
 indwelling of: John of St. Thomas on, I, 152
 knowledge of: quasi-experimental role in spiritual life, I, 159
 man's quasi-experimental knowledge of, I, 154-73
 natural immediate apprehension of, I, 168 ff.
 presence of: Gardeil on, I, 165; in the just, I, 147; Saudreau on knowledge of, I, 166; Suarez on, I, 141; Vasquez on, I, 140
 quasi-experimental knowledge of, I, 150 ff.: Galtier on, I, 154 note
 special presence of, I, 138: theological views, I, 140 ff.
 union with: love the bond of, I, 79
 will of: conformity to, I, 329
 God's love for all, I, 37
 God's love for us, I, 40: the Incarnation and, I, 43
 God's will, pure hope and abandonment to, II, 156
 Good, lesser: choice of, I, 319, 329 ff.
 Good, man's threefold, II, 406
 Good, the sovereign: happiness in, I, 35
 Good death, grace of a, II, 352
 Good works, communicable merit of, II, 364 note
 Goodness, self-effusive, I, 45
 Grace: divine union and order of, II, 208; of final perseverance, II, 348-54; of a good death, II, 352; its fullness in Christ, I, 178; needed for our love of God, I, 36
 Graces: of purification in night of the soul, II, 97-196; withdrawal of sensible, II, 27 ff.
 Gratitude for humiliations, II, 67
 Gravity, Newton's formulation of law of, I, 126
 Great Commandment, basis for, I, 29
 Grief: of Christ, I, 204, 208; union of happiness and, I, 211
 Grignon de Montfort: *L'Amour de la divine Sagesse* by, I, 315; on asking for gift of wisdom, I, 398; on Christ's love of the cross, I, 222; on devotion to Mary against unchaste temptations, II, 61; on praying to Mary at Communion, I, 397
 Growth of charity, I, 365-70: meritorious acts and, I, 370-80
 Habits, specific difference among, I, 255
 Happiness: in finite good, I, 35; union of grief and, I, 211
 Hatred toward enemies, I, 304
 Heaven, charity never lost in, I, 385
 Hebrews, Epistle to the: priesthood of Christ in, II, 293-97
 Hidden life: apostolate of the, II, 91; of St. Joseph, II, 380; St. Joseph model of, II, 366-83; value of the, II, 91
 Holy Ghost: consecration to, II, 90, 420; fruits of the, II, 78; soul of the mystical body, I, 226
 Hope: abandonment to God's will and pure, II, 156; passive purification of, II, 144-60; Satan's part in purification of, II, 153; strengthened by knowledge of God, II, 46; temptations against, II, 106, 121, 211

- "Hour," Christ's, I, 186
 Hugon on kingship of Christ, II, 322
 Humiliations, gratitude for, II, 67
 Humility: degrees of, II, 128; and piety on trial, II, 126; strengthened by knowledge of God, II, 46; virtue of, I, 294
 Hypocrisy of beginners, II, 7
- Illuminative way: dawning of, II, 31; full development of, II, 384, 411-19; progress from purgative way to, II, 70; purification of senses at beginning of, II, 36; St. John of the Cross on, II, 77
 Imelda, Blessed: miraculous Communion of, I, 390
Imitation of Christ on love of suffering, I, 221
 Impatience in natural activity, I, 312
 Impeccability of Christ, II, 331-46
 Imperfect contrition, I, 276
 Imperfection, I, 318-44: crux of the question of, I, 337; difficulties about question of, I, 331; and venial sin compared, I, 318, 339
 Imperfections, St. John of the Cross on elimination of, I, 343
 Imperfections of beginners, II, 6
 Impetuosity, I, 310
 Incarnation, the: and God's love for us, I, 43; motive of, I, 184; need of, II, 387; temptations against faith in the, II, 141 note
 Increase of love for God, I, 365-80
 Indifference of some human acts, I, 300 note, 309
 Indwelling of Trinity, I, 264: love of God and, I, 136-73; St. Thomas on, I, 144 ff.; source of spiritual life, II, 200; transforming union a result of, II, 220
 Infused contemplation, I, 256, II, 110: and acquired contemplation, II, 122 note; attitude to, II, 34; from meditation to, II, 34; in normal way of sanctity, II, 47
 Infused virtues, I, 255 note, 256: and acquired virtues, I, 273
 Inordinate tendencies, mortification and our, I, 301-9
 Intellect: superiority over will, I, 84; will and, I, 37
- Jesus; *see* Christ
 John of St. Thomas on indwelling of God, I, 152
 John of the Cross, St.
 doctrinal agreement of St. Thomas and, I, 4 ff.
 on elimination of imperfections, I, 343
 on illuminative way, II, 77
 language of St. Thomas and of, I, 12
 on mortification, I, 254-60
 passive purification of the soul according to, II, 97-122
 St. Thomas and, I, 4 ff.
 spirituality of St. Alphonsus and doctrine of, II, 234-67
 transforming union described by, II, 214
 views of St. Alphonsus and of, II, 228
- Joseph, St.
 first among the saints, II, 366-83
 hidden life of, II, 380
 Leo XIII on, II, 367
 mission of, II, 370
 model of the hidden life, II, 366-83
 virtues and gifts of, II, 379
 Just, presence of God in the, I, 147
- Kant and love of God, I, 60 note
 Keusch, *Die Aszetik des hl. Alfons* by, II, 229
 Kingship of Christ, II, 314-30
 basis of, II, 321-27
 excellence of, II, 321-27
 exercise of, II, 327-30
 exercised in the Church, II, 328
 Hugon on, II, 322
 nature of, II, 321-27
 in Scripture, II, 315-21

- Knowledge; gift of, II, 19, 43; wisdom different from, II, 18
 Knowledge of God: charity and hope strengthened by, II, 46; humility strengthened by, II, 46; Galtier on, I, 154 note; quasi-experimental, I, 150-73; role in spiritual life, I, 159; and self-knowledge, II, 44
 Knowledge of self, experimental, I, 167
- Lallemant, *The Spiritual Doctrine* by, II, 76
 Leo XIII: encyclical *Quanquam pluries* by, II, 367; on St. Joseph, II, 367
 Lesser evil, choice of, I, 327
 Lesser good, choice of, I, 319, 329 ff., 337 ff.
 Liberty: of Christ, II, 331-46; of the saints, II, 341-46; world's notion of, II, 333-36
 Life, spiritual: indwelling of Trinity the source of, II, 200; mystical order and the place of unitive, II, 228-67; seven degrees of, II, 24
 Life, the hidden: St. Joseph model of, II, 366-83; value of, II, 91
 Life of perfection, the narrow, II, 384
 Light, obscure, II, 116 ff.
 Love (*see also* Charity)
 degrees of: St. John of the Cross on, II, 80
 disinterested; *see* Pure love
 "folly" of, I, 88
 of friendship, I, 39, 68, 86
 of God for us, I, 29-54
 kinds of, I, 116
 mother's, I, 40
 natural, I, 114
 problems of pure, I, 55-135: erroneous solutions, I, 60 ff.; Richard of St. Victor on, 68 ff.; St. Bernard on, I, 68 ff.; St. Thomas on, I, 85-125
 of self: Aristotle on, I, 105 ff.; St. Thomas on, I, 107 ff.; *see also* Pure love
 union by: St. Thomas on, I, 143
- Love for God
 basis of our, I, 37
 degrees of, II, 215
 increase of, I, 365-80
 and indwelling of Trinity, I, 136-73
 more than ourselves; *see* Pure love
 and mystery of the Cross, I, 174-223
 and mystical body, I, 224-42
 natural tendency to, I, 33
 need of grace for our, I, 36
 our return of, I, 48 ff.
 Piux XI on precept of, I, 55
 reason and, I, 31
 St. Thomas on love of self and, I, 58
 self-love and, I, 34
 supernatural charity and natural, I, 98
 taking first place, II, 49
 Lucy, St.: on internal presence of God, I, 139
 Luther: on virginity, I, 347; on vow of chastity, I, 349
 Lying, sinfulness of, I, 328
- Married life, state of virginity higher than, I, 348
 Martyrdom of the saints, I, 51
 Mary
 cause of sufferings of, II, 354
 as coredemptrix, I, 231
 fruitfulness of sufferings of, II, 358
 fullness of spirit of priesthood, I, 350
 her progress by Communion, I, 390
 her understanding of the Cross, II, 138
 intercession by, II, 361
 life of union through Jesus and, II, 199-448
 measure of her love for God, II, 355
 mediatrix and grace of final perseverance, II, 348-54
 model of life of reparation, II, 347-65
 mystery of sorrows of, II, 354-65
 oblation of, II, 400
- Mass
 Bossuet on the, II, 312
 Christ the priest and victim, II, 391
 and Christ's sacrifice identical, II, 393

- Mass (*continued*)
 Council of Trent on sacrifice of the, II, 292
 doctrine of sacrifice of the, II, 292
 the mystical body offered at, II, 399
 our uniting of ourselves to the sacrifice of the, II, 400
 the soul of the, II, 384-410
 "Mean" in St. Thomas, I, 5 ff.
 Meditation: to contemplation from, II, 34; difficulty in, II, 15, 22, 31; progressives' use of, II, 36
 Meekness, fruits of, II, 62
 Merit: of good works communicable, II, 364 note; purgatory without, II, 111
 Meritorious acts and increase of charity, I, 365-80
 Montfort, Grignon de: on mortification, I, 315
 Mortification, I, 245 ff.
 as active purification, I, 262
 defined, I, 261
 destruction of remains of sin by, I, 281
 flower of, I, 345-62
 of natural activity, I, 309-17
 necessity of, I, 250-53
 and our inordinate tendencies, I, 201-209
 and our supernatural end, I, 299, 317
 and practical naturalism, I, 246-49
 of pride, I, 306
 reasons for, I, 263
 and remission of punishment due to sin, I, 278-80
 and results of original sin, I, 263-66
 and results of personal sin, I, 275-86
 St. John of the Cross on, I, 254-60
 St. Thomas on, I, 254-60
 Mother's love, I, 40
 Movement, circular: of the angels, II, 114
 Mysteries of the Rosary, II, 432-48
 Mystical body of Christ
 Christ's influence on, I, 231
 incorporation into, I, 228 ff.
 love of God and, I, 224-42
 nature of, I, 225

- Mystical body of Christ (*continued*)
 offered at Mass, II, 399
 the soul of, I, 226
 unity in diversity, I, 227
 Mystical order, place of unitive life and the, II, 228-67
 Mystical theology, II, 110
 Natural activity: dangers of, I, 300; degrees of, I, 310; mortification of, I, 309-17
 "Natural activity," meaning of, I, 309
 Naturalism, mortification and practical, I, 246-49
 Nature: charity and, I, 119; and sin, I, 121 ff.
 Newton: law of gravity formulated by, I, 126; St. Thomas and, I, 126-35
 Night of the senses
 length of, II, 72
 period between night of the soul and, II, 82
 sensible inclinations quenched by, II, 41
 spiritual sloth and, II, 12
 temptations: against chastity, II, 51; against patience, II, 51
 time for the, II, 68 ff.
 trials accompanying, II, 51-75
 union with God following, II, 76-94
 what is to be done during, II, 27-39
 Night of the soul: described by St. Teresa, II, 83; description of, II, 101; period between night of the senses and, II, 82; purifying graces of, II, 97-196
 Nominalist theologians, II, 131
 Noria, the, II, 37, 84
 Oblation: of Christ during His earthly life, II, 388; Mary's, II, 400; of ourselves, II, 403
 Obscure light, II, 103
 Offering; *see* Oblation
 Order, place of unitive life and the mystical, II, 228-67
 Orders, religious: practice of penance in, I, 285

- Original sin: God's permission of, I, 185; mortification and results of, I, 263, 266; wounds resulting from, I, 265, 267-74
 Pan-Christians, Pius XI on, I, 161 note
 Passion, the: and peace of Christ, I, 189-223
 Passions, regulation of, I, 247
 Passive purification; *see* Purification
 Path of perfection, narrow, II, 411-19
 Patience: fruits of, II, 62; in night of the senses temptations against, II, 51
 Patriotism, nature of, I, 226
 Paul, St.: his willingness to be anathema, I, 124
 Peace: and sorrow in the dying Christ, I, 193 ff.; union of sorrow and, I, 206 ff.
 Peace of Christ and His passion, I, 189-223
 Penal sufferings, II, 177
 Penance (sacrament): and baptism compared, I, 280; satisfaction part of, I, 280
 Penance (virtue): basis of, I, 279; its practice in religious orders, I, 285; reparation prompted by, I, 278; special end of, I, 275
 Perfect, fewness of the, II, 73
 Perfect contrition, I, 276
 Perfection: the narrow life of, II, 384; the narrow path of, II, 411-19
 Perfection, Christian: St. Augustine on, I, 30; St. Thomas on, I, 30
 Perfection of charity: as man's end, I, 52, 55; two methods of reaching, I, 53
 Persecution from friends, II, 65
 Perseverance, final: Mary and grace of, II, 348-54
 Personal sin; *see* Sin, personal
 Persons, divine: temporal missions of, I, 161 ff.; *see also* Trinity
 Picard: on immediate apprehension of God, I, 168 ff.; *La saisie immédiate de Dieu dans les états mystiques* by, I, 168
 Piety: gift of, I, 9; II, 23, 81; and humility on trial, II, 126
 Pius XI: on Christ the priest, II, 311; encyclical *Studiorum ducem* by, I, 55; on Pan-Christians, II, 161 note; on precept to love God, I, 55
 Place of unitive life and the mystical order, II, 228-67
 Plato on supreme Beauty, I, 32
Pondus crucis and *pondus gloriae*, Chardon on, I, 182
 Prayer: growth of virtue with, II, 90; infallibly efficacious, II, 352; progress in virtue and progress in, II, 85; of quiet, II, 84; of union, II, 87
 Precept and counsel compared, I, 323
 Predestination, I, 10
 Presence of God
 Chardon on, I, 163
 experience or quasi-experience of, I, 165 ff.
 Gardeil on, I, 165
 general, I, 137
 in the just, I, 147
 Soudreau on knowledge of, I, 166
 special, I, 138; theological views, I, 140 ff.
 Suarez on, I, 141
 Vasquez on, I, 140
 Presence of Trinity: in the just, I, 136-53; in purified souls, II, 199-227
 Pride: mortification of, I, 306; root of all vices, II, 60; source of sins, I, 290; spiritual, II, 101
 Priesthood of Christ: Bossuet on, II, 310; in Epistle to the Hebrews, II, 293-97; and life of union, II, 291-313; perfection of, II, 297-308; Pius XI on, II, 311
 Proficients; *see* Progressives
 Progress: in charity, I, 245; Communion and arrested, I, 392; in prayer and in virtue, II, 85
 Progressives: interior pleasure of, II, 79; use of meditation by, II, 36
 Psalm 21, II, 104; in last words of Christ, I, 190

- Punishment due to sin: mortification and, I, 278-80
- Pure love, problem of I, 55-138, 60 f., 100 ff.
- Pure love of God: Cajetan on, I, 99; St. Bernard on, I, 70
- Purgation, duration of soul's, II, 106
- Purgative way, progress to illuminative way from, II, 70
- Purgatory: acts of charity in, I, 375; without merit, II, 111
- Purification, active, I, 245 ff.
 mortification as, I, 262
 state of: beginning of contemplation, II, 18; the causal explanation, II, 18-26
- Purification, passive
 of charity, II, 161-75: essential features of, II, 162
 of faith, II, 123-43
 of hope, II, 144-60: God's part, II, 145; Satan's part, II, 153
 obscure forms of, II, 180
- Purification of the senses, passive, II, 3-26
 at beginning of illuminative way, II, 36
 effects of, II, 40-50
 necessity for, II, 6-10
 signs of, II, 13
 the psychological description of, II, 10-18
- Purification of the soul, passive
 described by St. John of the Cross, II, 97-122
 necessity of, II, 98
 and perfect purity of faith, II, 137
 signs of, II, 176-96
 theological explanation, II, 108
 trials accompanying, II, 123
- Purifying graces of night of the soul, II, 97-196
- Quanam pluries* (encyclical) of Leo XIII, II, 367
- Quiet, prayer of, II, 84
- Quietists and examination of conscience, I, 291
- Raptures, II, 89
- Reason and love of God, I, 31
- Religion, growth of virtue of, II, 129
- Religious institutes: practice of penance in, I, 285; trials at foundation, II, 68
- Religious life in apostolic orders, elements of, II, 282-90
- Remission of sin, I, 276 f.
- Reparation: Mary model of life of, II, 347-65; for others, I, 123; prompted by virtue of penance, I, 278
- Richard of St. Victor: *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* by, I, 73; on pure love, I, 68 ff.
- Rosary, the mysteries of the, II, 432-48
- Rousselot on qualities of love, I, 83
- Ruysbroeck: on gift of fortitude, II, 22; on gifts of Holy Ghost, II, 20
- Sacrifice of the Mass and of Christ, II, 393
- Saints: liberty of the, II, 341-46; martyrdom of the, I, 51; purification of faith in the lives of the, II, 139; St. Joseph first among the, II, 366-83
La saisie immédiate de Dieu dans les états mystiques by Picard, I, 168
- Sanctity, exceptional: required for exceptional mission, II, 368
- Satisfaction, part of sacrament of penance, I, 280
- Saudreau on knowledge of God's presence, I, 166
- Scrupulosity to be avoided in examination of conscience, I, 291
- Self-contempt, II, 104, 109
- Self-knowledge, II, 42: knowledge of God and, II, 44
- Self-love: inordinate, I, 288; love of God and, I, 34
- Sensations, dulling of, I, 131 note
- Senses, crosses of the, II, 3-94
- Senses, night of the; *see* Night
- Senses, purification of the; *see* Purification
- Sensibility of body of Christ, I, 203
- Sensible graces, withdrawal of, II, 27 ff.

- Sensible inclinations, quenched by night of the senses, II, 41
- Sermon on the Mount, I, 302 ff.
- Seven words on the cross, I, 189 ff.
 "Short cut, the," II, 88 note
- Sin
 egoism source of, I, 288
 mortification and destruction of remains of, I, 281
 mortification and remission of punishment due to, I, 278-80
 natural inclination to virtue weakened by, I, 122
 nature and, I, 121 ff.
 original: four wounds caused by, I, 265; God's permission of, I, 185; *see also* Original
 our proneness to, I, 282
 personal: mortification and results of, I, 275-86
 pride as source of, I, 290
 punishment merited by, I, 278
 remission of, I, 276 f.
 St. Augustine's definition of, I, 333
 venial: avoidance of all, I, 277; and charity, I, 381-86; charity impaired by, I, 382, 393; and imperfection compared, I, 318, 339
- Sins, capital, I, 248: examination of conscience with reference to, I, 288-92; outline of, I, 289
- Sloth, spiritual: and night of the senses, II, 12
- Sorrow and peace, union of, I, 206 ff.
- Sorrows of Mary, mystery of, II, 354-65
- Soul: crosses of the, II, 97-196; night of the (*see* Night); purification of the (*see* Purification)
- Souls, separated: knowledge of themselves, II, 207 note
- Sovereign Good, happiness in, I, 35
- Speed of falling bodies, I, 127
- Spiritual crosses, II, 225
- Spiritual Doctrine* by Lallemand, II, 76
- Spiritual life, indwelling of Trinity
 source of, II, 200
- Spiritual pride, II, 101
- Spiritual progress and daily Communion, I, 387-99
- Spirituality of St. Alphonsus, II, 229-34: and doctrine of St. John of the Cross, II, 234-67
- State of purification; *see* Purification
- La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique* by Gardeil, I, 140
- Studiorum ducem* (encyclical), I, 55
- Study by beginners, II, 8
- Suarez on presence of God, I, 141
- Sublimity of the apostolic life, II, 268-90
- Suffering, love of: Chardon on, I, 218; *Imitation of Christ* on, I, 221; in reparation for others, I, 123
- Sufferings: cause of Mary's, II, 354; fruitfulness of Mary's, II, 358; penal, II, 177
- Sufferings of Christ, I, 202 ff., 214: willed by Him, I, 187
- Superiors, opposition of, II, 66
- Suso, Henry (Blessed), *Book of Eternal Wisdom* by, II, 270
- Temperance, infused and acquired, I, 256
- Temptation: chief works for resisting, I, 284; by the devil, I, 283; resistance to, I, 283-86
- Temptations
 benefit of, II, 54
 against charity, II, 106, 121
 against chastity: devotion to Mary a strength against, II, 61
 from concupiscence, II, 57
 by the devil, 147: God's permission of, II, 56
 against faith, II, 106, 121, 211: in life of St. Vincent de Paul, II, 107, 140
 against hope, II, 106, 121, 211
 need of, II, 55
 in night of the senses, II, 51 ff.
 within our strength, II, 55
- Tendencies, mortification and our inordinate, I, 301-9
- Teresa, St.: conversion of, II, 152 note; her freedom from concupiscence, II, 58; night of the soul described

- Teresa, St. (*continued*)
 by, II, 83; on transforming union, II, 226
- Theological virtues, the, II, 129
- Theology, mystical, II, 110
- Thomas, St.
 on Christian perfection, I, 30
 doctrinal agreement of St. John of the Cross and, I, 4 ff.
 his freedom from concupiscence, II, 58
 on indwelling of Trinity, I, 144 ff.
 language of St. John of the Cross and of, I, 12
 on love of God and love of self, I, 58
 on mortification, I, 254-60
 Newton and, I, 126-35
 on pure love, I, 68 ff.
 St. John of the Cross and, I, 4 ff.
 spirituality of St. Alphonsus and principles of, II, 234-67
 views of St. Alphonsus and of, II, 228
 Way of the Cross according to, II, 421-31
- Time for night of the senses, II, 68 ff.
- Transforming union, II, 170, 199-227:
 Chardon on, II, 222; result of indwelling of Trinity, II, 220; according to St. John of the Cross, II, 214; St. Teresa on, II, 226
- Trent, Council of: on the Mass, II, 292; on state of virginity, I, 347
- Trials, two kinds of, II, 5
- Trinity
 abiding in purified souls, II, 199-227
 indwelling of, I, 264; love of God and, I, 136-73; St. Thomas on, I, 144; source of spiritual life, II, 200; transforming union a result of, II, 220
 invisible missions of, II, 222
 presence in the just, I, 136-53
 principle of supernatural operation, I, 161
- Understanding: gift of, II, 23, 112 ff., 151, 173, 211; the infused light of, II, 116

- Union
 with God: following night of the senses, II, 76-94; love the bond of, I, 79
 life of: through Jesus and Mary, II, 199-448; priesthood of Christ and, II, 291-313
 by love: St. Thomas on, I, 143
 order of grace and the divine, II, 208
 prayer of, II, 87
 the transforming, II, 170, 199-227:
 Chardon on, II, 222; result of indwelling of Trinity, II, 220; according to St. John of the Cross, II, 214; St. Teresa on, II, 226
- Unitive life, place of: and the mystical order, II, 228-67
- Unitive way, full development of, II, 384, 411-19
- Unity of the apostolic life, II, 268-90
- Vanity of things created, II, 19
- Vasquez on presence of God, I, 140
- Veiling of virgins, I, 351
- Venial sin: avoidance of all, I, 277; and charity, I, 381-86; charity inspired by, I, 393; how charity is inspired by, I, 382; and imperfection compared, I, 318, 339
- Vices, pride the root of all, II, 60
- Victimhood of Christ, participation in, II, 171
- Vincent de Paul, St.: Credo written by, II, 107; temptations against faith, II, 107, 140
- Virginity
 consecrated, I, 345-62
 contemplation and, I, 355
 Council of Trent on, I, 347
 its state higher than married life, I, 348
 Luther on, I, 347
 not greatest virtue, I, 351
 object of evangelical counsel, I, 346
 and the other virtues, I, 349
 St. Augustine's definition of, I, 345
 St. Catherine of Siena on, I, 357
 St. Thomas on virtue of, I, 345

- Virgins, veiling of, I, 351
- Virtue: growth with prayer, II, 90; progress in prayer and progress in, II, 85; sin's weakening influence on, I, 122
- Virtues
 acquired and infused, I, 273
 cardinal, I, 294
 examination of conscience with reference to, I, 292-98
 infused, I, 255 note, 256
 outline of, I, 295
 the purifying, I, 257
 the theological, II, 129
- Vow of chastity, Luther on, I, 349
- Vows, the three religious, II, 406
- Way of the Cross, according to St. Thomas, II, 421-31
- Western Mysticism* by Butler, I, 166
- Will, intellect and, I, 33
- Will, free: exemplar of our, II, 331-46
- Will of God, conformity to, I, 329
- William of Auxerre on order of charity, I, 93
- Wisdom: charity and gift of, I, 398; fruit of, II, 75; gift of, II, 205; knowledge different from, II, 18; de Montfort on asking for gift of, I, 398
- Word, the incarnate: personality of, I, 176 ff.